DOIN' THE WORK: Frontline Stories of Social Change

Black Social Workers Speak Out About Social Work Education –
André Marcel Harris, BSW; Dashawna J. Fussell-Ware, MSW; Deana Ayers, BSW; Vivian Taylor, MSW
Episode 33
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Shimon Cohen:

Welcome to Doin' The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change, where we bring you stories of real people working to address real issues. I am your host Shimon Cohen. Thank you to FIU's Disability Resource Center for providing transcription services. This episode is a collaboration with SWCAREs - Social Work Coalition for Anti-Racist Educators - who are doing phenomenal work to transform social work. SWCAREs members Charla Yearwood and Laura Hoge dropped serious knowledge on Episode 27 White Supremacy in Social Work.

Shimon Cohen:

I'm so excited that Charla is back on Doin' the Work, this time as the host. Charla facilitates a discussion with a group of amazing Black social workers who talk about their experiences with social work education. I chose to pass the mic to Charla because I wanted to give this platform to Black social workers, to have a conversation without white people so that it could be really open without any filter I may impose on it when I'm interviewing.

Shimon Cohen:

I'm grateful to Charla for doing this. And to André, Dashawna Deana and Vivian for their time, courage and vulnerability. They are giving the social work world a gift with this episode. Something that jumped out to me about their stories is how social work education is so violent towards Black students on so many levels. This has to change. The guests' social media and contact info along with Cash App and Venmo accounts are in the show notes so please give them support. I hope this conversation inspires you to action.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Hi guys, how are you doing?

Group:

Good.

Group:

Hello?

Group:

Hey.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

I'm so excited. So excited to see all you beautiful Brown folks. I'm going to go around and just ask that everyone introduce themselves and give your pronouns. I know there's quite a bit of us on the call, there's five of us. Vivian.

Vivian:

Hey everyone. My name is Vivian. My gender pronouns are she, her and hers, ya heard. [crosstalk 00:02:26].

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

And what social work degrees do you have?

Vivian:

I hold a Master's of Social Work degree.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Awesome. André, who are you and what are your pronouns and what... Are you in a program? What social work education that you have?

André:

Yes. My name is André Harris, my pronouns are him and his. I hold a BSW and I am about to transition into a MSW PhD dual degree program.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Dashawna.

Dashawna:

So my name is Dashawna. I currently have an MSW and I am in a PhD program, PhD in social work program.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Deana.

Deana:

Hi, my name is Deana. I use they, them pronouns and I have a Bachelor of Social Work degree.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Thank you guys all so much for agreeing to be here with me and to have this conversation. I really honor and appreciate your vulnerability to have this conversation. Because I think it's something that we all know about and we all talk about together, but we don't always talk about it in mixed company. So, thank you guys for being open enough to share your experiences with the social work community. Let's start with you, Deana, in your experience, does social work, and specifically social work education, have a problem with racism and white supremacy?

Deana:

I would say that's a resounding yes, there's a really big problem, especially with white supremacy and not addressing it. And so, I see it pop up in three ways with not acknowledging our history, focusing on diversity, but not focusing on racial justice, and then with kind of where the, we're already a liberal,

progressive, education, already a progressive profession. So, we don't need to do anything else. I would say, definitely yes and it pops up in those three ways.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yeah, I can totally see how it pops up in all those ways. André, what are your thoughts on that?

André:

Me, I've been looking at the question for days now to formulate an answer. But I first of all want to preface and say that I attended an HBCU. So, I think that kind of skews my answer just a little bit.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

I love it.

André:

However, I will say, being someone who is Black and even in an HBCU our curriculum in what we're taught, in my opinion, and in the opinions of my mentors and my professors, have been that we have taken theories and we've taken best practices that were created by people who were not people of color. And they were tested on people who were not of color. And so, we have a lot of these theories and best practices that we're trying to implement in households or communities of color and wonder why a lot of times they don't work. And so, I appreciate my HBCU education for allowing me to understand that it's going to take people of color, Black people specifically in this conversation to create research, create curriculum and best practices to implement in households and communities of color. I hope that answers your question in some form.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

You blew that question of the water.

André:

No.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Perfect. Thank you so much. I really appreciate your HBCU experience because I want to make sure that that one does not get muddled. And then... So thank you for bringing that perspective.

André:

Absolutely.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Vivian, what's your experience and what's your overall perception of racism and white supremacy and social work and social work education?

Vivian:

For me, it's more the ownership. Sitting in a class was a consistent experience of Black people are those who are always on the recipient side of services, not necessarily the provider, the theories that they

were following, any of that. In fact, it's a complete erasure in acknowledging that, as Rachel Cargle said a few weeks ago on the conversation, ''They're trying to make white heroes my heroes.'' In fact, one of the things that we did with the curriculum committee that we built was just point out my heroes are Ida B. Wells. My heroes are my moms. My heroes are my teachers and the ladies at church who developed resources for the Black community. And none of that ever got highlighted in white classes.

Vivian:

It was a difference when I took the Black social work class that was taught by a awesome professor, D. Price, just no one call her D. Price today. But if she listen then she know who I'm talking about. And that class was more affirming, but it was still a struggle to be in the class because we still have white students who, unfortunately, are still developing their racial analysis and learning how to conduct themselves in Black spaces. And so, sometimes we can just be watching Black brutalized bodies in a clip and they'll be on their cell phones. You can't be insensitive to this. If I have to watch this, so do you.

Vivian:

And then, oftentimes, if we read Black books in a lot of white classrooms the experience was, we read Just Mercy, but we didn't conduct the racial analysis. And having it taught by a white professor who also struggled to teach that content was also a challenge of, throw the whole class away. I'm just going to leave class today and come try this again tomorrow. That learning should be enjoyable and it should challenge you. But we were not really creating space for that because, of course, white fragility is rampant. And it just saddens me because they still get their degree, but they're out here causing harm in the program. They're going to cause harm to the clients.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yeah. I think we all have had similar experiences. Dashawna, you want to give your perspective?

Dashawna:

Yeah. I just realized on the last question, I did not give out my pronouns. The pronouns that I use are she, her and hers. And in terms of, if we have a racism program problem in social work education, of course the answer is yes. To touch back on where Vivian left off, I've been to two social work schools. At one of them I experienced racism over and covert among my fellow students. And at the other, I experienced racism among faculty members and staff and administrators. And so, to touch on students, to have students in year classes say extremely problematic things and have no one check them. And when you check them, you are the problem. And when you go to people about the fact that these things are problematic, no one really does anything.

Dashawna:

And you know that people are going to go out into the world and cause harm to their communities. Because everyone likes to believe that they're going to go out after they get their terminal degree and do private practice in these really like white communities. But what happens is they end up in defects, which disproportionately has Black kids in its system and Black families in its system. Or they don't end up working with white people. They end up working with people that are like me and, they're working with Latinx people. And they cause unnecessary, additional harm to our communities. And there's nothing that you can do except for watch, because it's not like social work programs do a great job of really weeding people out. There's no procedure in place to be like, ''You know what? This may or may

not be a good fit. So we suggest that you don't, we're just going to cut y-.'' there's no process in place for programs to cut ties with students, which I think is a gap that somebody should feel.

Dashawna:

But then, on the other hand, my experience with faculty who are problematic is that number one, the power differential and calling out, hey, that was racist, I really wish you wouldn't say stuff like that class. Or, you just shouldn't say stuff like that in class. Or, you shouldn't show things like that in class. Or, we shouldn't have to read this stuff in class. And not just the things that you read and watch and say, but the things that you don't read and watch and say. I am an early, I am a self-labeled early career critical race theorist. And I have, when everyone asked me about that, I tell them that everything I know about critical race theory, I taught myself, I am completely self-taught. I did a presentation in my HBSC class. It was an extra group project presentation. It was in the syllabus, but not as something that was to be taught by the instructor, but to be taught as a group project.

Dashawna:

When I transitioned into another program, I taught it during my first semester. I taught it during my second semester. I just taught it during my last semester. So, every time critical race theory is taught in my social work education, I'm the one that's teaching it. And that's problematic because no one is out here hunting for CBT resources, we're not hunting for motivational interviewing and all that jazz. So, it's just like the erasure and the attack, the abuse that Black students and Black faculty have to go through. And social work is a huge problem.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yeah. You bring up some really good points. Playing off of what you guys are talking about, I'm thinking about experiences that, I'm going to put myself in there too, from my MSW experience. The experiences that we have interacting with our peers, it's not just the faculty of the school and the institution, but peer interactions that we have in the social work classroom around race. And then also the response that we get from the faculty leading those classes. Does anybody have a situation that they would like to share? Deana, tell me about it.

Deana:

I don't necessarily have a specific situation, but the way that you phrase that question made me think of, frequently when we like are pre-social work majors about to actually start the program. There's a lot of talk about gate keeping and our professors and the social work administrators are the gatekeepers to our profession. And, I think, to me it comes across as a very white supremacist tactic of, okay, when people are... People in our program are telling me that they support Trump. That if people are trans that they're not going to accept it. I've had my classmates get mad at me for talking about abortion and there's no gate keeping to that. There's no saying that belief that you have, you can have it, but it's not in line with social work. But God forbid somebody messed up a comment in their application, then they won't even get into the program. So it's just like, there's a lot of gate keeping.

Deana:

And while I think there's worth in making sure that the people who are coming into this profession are the people that we want in this profession. To me, that doesn't mean that people need to have the right grammar or interview well, it means they need to actually care about other people. But when we center

it on professionalism, that's where a lot of the white supremacy in pre-social work really pops up and popped up for me.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Preach, preach Vivian.

Vivian:

Yes, Deana. One of my biggest frustrations with my experience in my program really was around finance. And talking to peers, peer interaction is big. I applied to a particular best special scholarship program and got denied. One of my peers told me that he didn't even apply for the program, but they had read his resume and contacted him and told him to apply and that's how he got in. He was a white male with a lot of support already. I'll also notice that there were white people inside the new African American Leaders of Social Work scholarship program. And I'm just like, every scholarship is basically designed for white people. And yet, every time they have an opportunity to support a marginalized identity, we can't even have the little support that's made for us. And it's frustrating because it makes social work degrees really inaccessible for marginalized identities.

Vivian:

Because as Deana said, I'm in a profession of helping people, I generally care about people. What does me putting a comma, having the perfect resume, have to do with that. And it goes back to thinking that, should we have social work prep programs to assist students in writing these impeccable applications to get the money? When most of these people that get it don't need the money, honestly. It's a very problematic thing because it's not just the anger about rejection, it's multiple rejections from scholarships. So, I'm like, who's judging these scholarships? Of course it's white people again. So, how was that really equitable? And how is that moving the profession forward?

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yeah. I definitely hear you. Something that I'm thinking about is, what are some of those structural things that are limiting access to social work education for Black and Brown folks? And speaking to things like the professionalism, and I know that that plays out, and that gate keeping, it plays out a lot and build education. How do you feel like the field is shaped around racism and racist practice? How do you feel like your school, your field instructor, could be agencies. Tell me a little bit about that, those connections, André.

André:

You must have been able to see, I had a response to what you just said. Again, I think I have a totally different perspective. Because, again, I am an HBCU grad. I was putting out... It's funny because when you all were asking about, do you want to be confidential about what you want to say? I'm thinking no way, not that I might say something I didn't think about [inaudible 00:17:39], but I won't mention names or institutions. When I was in field, I was placed at a agency that was just terrible, period. The executive director was terrible. Her staff were terrible, except for three, and then... It just was not a good experience for me, and then the other people who were placed there as well. And again, if somebody from my execution listens they'll know what I'm talking about, but it is what it is. So, the executive director of the place I got placed at, we found out was a staunch Donald Trump supporter. Even though she was of Latinx heritage, she loved her some Donald.

André:

And so, you can understand how that would affect the way she treats Black students from a Black school. We had one other Hispanic, older guy. He probably was in his sixties, who was placed there with us. And you could see the dynamics between them, how she treated him and how she treated the Black students. I say all of that to say, we had a big fiasco. I'll be on here all day at five, went through it, but we had a big fiasco. And I was the only one who really went up the chain of the command. So, I went to my field instructor, my field liaison, I went to everybody, I went to the director of the BSW program, I went to the dean, assistant dean. I let everybody know about our mistreatment. Honestly, I did not feel like they were advocating for the student. I felt like they were advocating for the executive director of this agency. And I, honestly, was very disappointed. I love my university. I love in my alma mater. I love the school of social work that I attended. In that instance I just felt like I was failed.

André:

And I think, when... I think systemically when students of color communicated grievance and it... I never just said the grievance was racist. I never said, ''I'm experiencing racism and that's the problem.'' But there was noticeable racial undertones. So, it wasn't like they didn't know. Especially when I told them she was a Trump supporter. And some of the things that she said made us uncomfortable. So, my field director came and met. And during the meeting, it was my field director, the agency director, me and a liaison. The director attacked me more and believed the agency more than she believed me. So, that kind of really hurt. And I really feel that schools need to pay attention when students complain because I just don't think a normal student would just take their time to make up a situation just to complain about. Nobody's about to just wake up in the morning and say, ''I just want to complain and just pull something out here.''

André:

So, I think it's very important that administration in schools, especially in schools of social work. When you have students in the field and they say that you field is problematic, please take it serious. Even if you think it's not serious, investigate a little better. And me, I feel like it's very... It was just a lot of anti-Blackness going on and I just couldn't get with it, that really put a bad taste in my mouth. And I have to kind of reign myself, because I could ramble about it all day. But I really think that the admin should be a little more sensitive. Especially in social work because we're taught, our code of ethics drills in our-, is drilled in our head. So, I was flabbergasted that you could teach about ethics, but then you're not really practicing what you preach. And you weren't advocating on my behalf, and that really bothered me. To this day, it still bothers me.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

That practice what you preach and the code of ethics, I think, is a pattern of conversation that we're hearing in a lot of different pockets of social work right now. And I'm hopeful that it's being heard. You talked about anti-Blackness, and Dashawna earlier talked about critical race theory. Just to piggyback off of that, I think we are all in agreement that the Black experience is diverse. And a commitment to anti-racism includes a commitment to the needs of disabled folks, LGBTQ folks, and all historically oppressed communities. We understand intersectionality. In your experience, how did you feel like... Or did you experience your... Or did you feel like your social work education, your social work institutions limited the Black experience? I don't really remember, I went to school a little bit ago, not too long ago. But we never talked about intersectionality. And when we talked about issues of other marginalized communities, we talked about them separate from Blackness. And so, I just want to hear a little bit from

you guys about that, because I think we all, most Black folks can understand various communities and how we fall in.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

So, Dashawna, you want to...

Dashawna:

Yeah. That's another framework that we didn't talk about until I got to my PhD program. I think that, in my experience, people are attuned to the fact that I am Black, but they don't think about the additional burden that I carry as a Black woman. And so, I think, especially with other social workers who identify as female, there are some slights that occur that when called out on it. People say, ''No, there's no way that I did that, or, ''There's no way I could have meant it like that. You're a woman and I'm a woman too.'' And I'm like, ''Yeah, but I'm a Black woman and you are not a Black woman.'' And so, me and other students that I've attended school with that are Black people that identify as female always talk about the extra burden that we feel like we carry, that is kind of not addressed.

Dashawna:

And to touch back on our gate keeping conversation. I really feel like in PhD programs, in that academic scholarly setting, gate keeping is a huge problem. Number one, we have a lot of social work faculty that are not social workers. And so, that leads to some issues. Which is not a problem, social work, it's interdisciplinary, and plays well with a lot of different fields. But when you bring faculty into schools of social work, you want to make sure they really internalize and live and breathe our code of ethics. And that does not always happen. And as a social work student you always have to question, was it because they're not a social worker? Do they just not understand because they are not a social worker because they don't have the MSW? What is it? Is it that? And so, some of the way-.

Dashawna:

Is it that? But on the other hand, so that's one issue, and then on the other hand, academia itself ... Social work is not immune from the problems associated with academia. So just because it's social work, a PhD program in social work is not immune from being white supremacist. It's not a immune being heteronormative. It is not immune from being cisgender centrist. And speaking specifically about white supremacy, this is definitely a problem for Black first generation students, who don't have anyone to tell them about how this works, how academia works, what you should and should not say, who you should and should not say it to.

Dashawna:

And instead of providing you with resources or good faith support and advisement, people will hold things against you. And so you always have to be concerned about, "Oh, did I say something, did I offend someone?" Because some people are not going to tell me, they're going to turn around and talk about it to another faculty member or someone else. And this may come back to harm me because I'm being my genuine, authentic self, as someone who is Black or someone who is nonwhite. And it's being misinterpreted as being rude or ratchet or angry or unprofessional, and so I think that ... It's interesting, I just want a paper about this.

Dashawna:

That there needs to be a change in terms of being explicit in our curriculum, both at the BSW, MSW and doctoral levels. About being explicitly anti-white supremacist, explicitly focused on racial justice and to be explicit in the support of Black students, to touch on Vivian's point earlier, about finances. To be specific about making sure that Black people have access to money, educational reparations, and things of that nature.

Dashawna:

To make sure that people of color are able to access social work education. Because, like I said, people want to believe that they're going out into white communities to do therapy, and that's not who you're going out there to see. Not to say that you have to look like your community to help them, but sometimes that's what gets your foot in the door. But we have a lot of white supremacists gatekeeping at all levels of education.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yeah. Deana, do you want to jump in real quick and talk about the diversity of Black folks?

Deana:

Yeah. So something that was interesting for me in my last semester, so this past spring, was that I came out to basically everyone in my life as nonbinary, except for my social work cohort and my professors. Because I knew how that was going to go. I spent my, I believe my first semester in my associate program, listening to a professor mis-gender the person sitting next to me, who use they/them pronouns, for that entire semester. And no one checked her. I mean, I tried to bring it up, but she just would laugh it off. And it was something that I brought up as, there's a lot of ways that professors can get students in trouble, so to speak, but there isn't really a way for us to express our grievances and our concerns.

Deana:

And that was our HBSE class, so on top of that, just being how she was teaching, the way that we were taught those different theories is, we understood intersectionality exists, systems theory exists, but we didn't really understand the power behind those theories. And also they weren't really applied correctly. So it was just a lot of, we have a baseline understanding of, yes, we understand Black issues and all of these things, but at the end of the day there's no real understanding of power dynamics of the power behind those theories that we're talking about. And how we're both impacting the other people in my cohort, as well as the people that were going to go into the community and work with and for.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

You just gave me some new thoughts, I'm making new connections and thinking about things differently. When you just talked about that the theories weren't used correctly, Dashawna earlier talked about having to do her own research. As I think about this, I recognize I knew that that's what we learn when we grow up. Our parents gave us that Black education separate from the school system, because the school subs not going to give it to us, and so we learned to get us some extra education on the side. Is anybody, André or Vivian, y'all want to jump in about the type of ways that you might have studied outside of class to actually learn about your people, your community, and how to serve them?

Vivian:

I know arts is one of the biggest things that I feel like the Black community represents. We're very creative and innovative as a people. And attending the National Association of Black Social Workers conference last April, hey, NSBSW in the house. So, one of the workshops I attended was the Triggered Project where I saw a one man monologue by Keith Mascoll, based out of Boston, Massachusetts, monologue on child sex abuse in Black males. It was the first time I ever seen anything like that and I was just in love, and I was a fan girl after the monologue. I needed to know the theory and da, da, da, da, da.

Vivian:

And so he gave it to me, shared the emails, and so did other Black practitioners that were present. I went back to school and created my own monologue about Black motherhood and how Black women are robbed of the joy of Black motherhood, of motherhood, just because of Blackness due to police brutality, names, and the list goes on. And my professor was like, "Well, what do you want to do with this?" I'm like, "Well, I would like for you guys to join in and we could teach it and blah, blah, blah." Every time I go to them with a new framework, a new theory, it just never goes anywhere.

Vivian:

It took me to get the support of my Black professor, thankfully, who created a space in our Black social work class to do our philosophy statements in any form that we wanted to. So I'll perform the monologue in class. Fortunately, she allowed me the opportunity to present at the student symposium, and again, at our Afrofuturism Project that Black students put together. I will highlight that we do have a New Leaders of African-American Social Work special scholars program, but it was moreso focused on those who were in that program, that could take that class, and you'll have to fight for a spot that's left over.

Vivian:

Which is unfair, because if education is supposed to be valuable, then everyone should have access to those courses. Because we're continuing to push unprepared social workers in the field when it comes to the critical race theories and the lives and experiences of Black and Brown communities. Consistently, I will find that NSBSW, or BSW is what we call the student chapters, was the space that was created for students to be able to teach our peers and our white professors, faculty and staff.

Vivian:

We will organize promote and market events that centered the contributions that Black social workers have made to the field, as well as highlight some of the inequalities and discrimination that we experience as Black practitioners. So what that looked like was an event that myself and my BSW colleagues organized called Liberation at Work. We celebrated Juneteenth before it was popular, y'all. We celebrated it at the school. And we also used the second half of the event to highlight how we're still fighting to be ourselves at work, in the aspect of my hair or the way we dress, do we participate in casual Friday?

Vivian:

As well as highlighting some things that we don't know such as, what does a CV? How do you use a CV? How to negotiate pay. We also highlighted networking and access because a lot of us do get these degrees as Black and Brown people, but we fail to recognize that we need to be a part of a network and

know how to use that network. So the response to that event was really overwhelmingly positive, based off the email responses that I got, social media comments. I was just so happy. The same things also happened with Beyond Black and White Social Work that my colleague, Bunchy Shakur, as well as Flow and student organization called Black Radical Healing Pathways.

Vivian:

They organize this workshop series where they highlighted Beyond Black and White Social Work, where they talked about the history, once again, of Black social workers. What we contribute to the field as well as challenging people, mainly white organizations, to be more, you could say, more of an ally in advocating for the needs of, not just Black clients that we serve, but also for the needs of the Black practitioners that they hire. Hire us in leadership, pay us fair, especially Black women, please pay us a fair wage, okay? And I just felt like it would be more beneficial if more educational programs, centering around social work, would take that type of lead.

Vivian:

So, much of our education about Black and Brown practitioners in the field of social work came from outside of the classroom. It was coming from Black students and their student groups, not from the courses, of course. And the work was very invaluable and yet, sometimes they went heavily unsupported, whether it was financially or through attendance. And then when it was attended, it was like, "Well, we want to have a one on one with you guys to da da da". I'm like, "Well, where's my money?" Sorry, I need to get paid. I don't want to be exploited. That was some of the experience.

Vivian:

But to note on some of the things that Dashawna said that resonated with me, are her points earlier, before I wrap it up is, I really wish we had more of the focus on diversity of Blackness. When I think about hood feminism books by Mikki Kendall recently, or Brittney Cooper's Beyond Respectability, it just burns me up that when I look at social work education, or any education that's educating on race, it's always cut in Black and white. You have Black elitists, all right? We have anti-Blackness within our own group. We have colorism, which for me, is a big issue because as a dark skinned Black woman, I scare people when I'm not trying to. If I look like a resting B face, people think I'm mad, intimidating, they don't want to talk to me.

Vivian:

And it could be even subtle on my white friend groups of, I'll say, "Oh, I used to be a substitute teacher." "Ooh, you probably scared all the kids. If you was my sub I would have been scared." And I'm like, "Well, what would make you say that?" Vivian means vivacious and bubbling with life, people. That's the meaning of my name, I ain't here to hurt nobody. And seeing how I don't have any control over that, it really bothers me. Then you think about poor students, you have the privileged poor that was written about. And I just feel like we don't create spaces to even explore all of this.

Vivian:

And it's an issue because when you think about who gets opportunities in the Black community, you're looking at Black men. You got Black men, depending on the organization, you're looking at light skinned, Black people. And then I'll look at those who are darker hues, particularly vocal Black women, who are really not at the table. And whether you already have to really buy into this respectable Black person

that white people feel comfortable with. And so I would just would like to see more of that implemented in our social work education. I'm a, well, why isn't that Black person at the table?

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

There are some great research out there from social workers on colorism, and you're right, that's an area of understanding Blackness and understanding of diversity that we don't even touch on in our coursework. We don't get to get there. André, you wanted to jump in on this?

André:

It's so much to say. I guess your initial question was parse out more about intersectionality about being Black. So I am Black and I am actually disabled, but I live with an invisible disability, so people don't consider that. And even though I went to a Historically Black College, I still felt like I was an outsider because I was a male in the social work space. I could count, on less than one hand, how many guys were in any social work class. And I will say that I was very impressed to see that we had several social work faculty members that were Black men, but when I say several, I would say ... several equals four. And a lot of them ended up transitioning to teach in the graduate program, so I didn't get to see all of them.

André:

So I say that to say, I know it may sound privileged, but in this case, in social work, you are very much a minority as a male. And I think it's very important to ... One of the reasons, and this is not a plug I promise, but-

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

No, I was going to plug it myself.

André:

It flows out, but I really appreciate ... I really don't want to sound self serving, but I really appreciate my group that I started, Black Men in Social Work. [crosstalk 00:40:25].

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

It is worth celebrating, highlight it. Talk about yourself.

André:

Thank you. But this is why, as of today, we have over, I think, 1200 members in our Facebook group. And of course we have an Instagram and a Twitter page. But with that group, I've been able to see that I'm not the only one that has these issues. And so I say this also to say, Black Men in Social Work, I created it with me and two other people four years ago. And it's just now, in the last year or so, getting momentum. But I created it only because I wanted the students to see whether they were in elementary, middle, high school, or even in college, that you don't have to be the Black guy who's on the football field to get out of the community.

André:

Or you don't have to be the one that's dribbling a basketball. Now, if you do that, that's fine, but that doesn't have to be the only thing you're known for. That doesn't have to be your career. And I'm not,

again, I don't want anyone to think that I'm bashing people for wanting to be athletic or bank on their athleticism. But when I tell younger guys that I'm a social work major, and I explain ... First of all, I have to get them over the hurdle that I'm not in CPS and I don't take nobody's kids.

André:

So that's just ... for social work period, that's something I think we all have to ... If we don't work in Child Protection, I think we all have to, "Hey, I'm not doing that. I don't do that. Every social worker doesn't do that." But then I also have to dispel the myth that social work is basically a white female profession. When people think of a social worker, they think of a white woman. And so I have to really convince men, it's okay to be a man and be a social worker. And, first of all, if you want to work in CPS, you can. Actually worked in CPS before I got my social work degree, which is weird, but I did other stuff. But you could do policy, you can do macro, you could do therapy, there's so many things you could do.

André:

You could be a medical social worker, you could be a political social worker. Being able to show Black men that this is something that you can do. And so I also wanted to say, with that though, going back but tying it to what we're talking about, is I seem to have had a lot more pushback at my HBCU about why I created a group called Black Men in Social Work than I did anywhere else. And I was very confused about it. So I used to have classmates who were Black, when I was trying to ... And there were other Black men, I want you to join the group. I want you to add your voice, blah, blah, blah. I think it would be great. And then I literally had one guy go toe to toe with me and say that ... I'm referencing, this older, Hispanic guy I told you about earlier.

André:

He was in the class and he said, "Well, what about my friend so and so? You're saying he can't join and you're being racist and you're not allowing him to have ..." and he went on this whole bit about me excluding and blah, blah, blah. And then there was one white kid in our program, and he brought him into it. It was a whole thing. And so my thing about this is, I think it's very important to normalize being Black and normalize that it's okay being Black and normalize that it's okay to have an affinity group that other people who don't meet the requirements can't join.

André:

It is not racist to have a group that says we're Black men in social work. If we had opportunities available to us, first of all, we wouldn't have to have a HBCU. Second of all, I'm sure that if the opportunities for Black men or Black people were available to be in social work, were there when social work really had its start, we wouldn't really have a need to have Black Men and Social Work. So now that we have a need to have it, don't make me feel bad because I'm offering a safe space for somebody to enjoy or to access. And so my group, it's not really just, oh, don't want Black people in our group.

André:

My group is really about Black ... we have professors, we have students, we have faculty, we have researchers. I have so many men posting in my group who are looking for scholarships, and they get scholarships. They're looking for fellowships, and they end up getting fellowships. They end up applying to a program because the professor post about a program, they're getting citizenship, they are getting access to resources they probably may not have had access to before. So I really had to mention that because I think it's imperative that we normalize the intersectionalities that we all have.

André:

And then I mentioned being disabled because one of the things that I had a thing about with my professor is, again, to me it's sad when you have to remind you professors about code of ethics. I kept telling them, there's no way you can be a social work professor and not be cognizant of the fact that there are some people who live with disabilities that ... Just because I don't sit in a wheelchair, or just because I don't drag my foot, or just because I don't slur my speech that doesn't mean I don't have a disability.

André:

So I had to really fight for the first, maybe two semesters I was in my program, to get appropriate resources to be able to successfully finish my program. And so I think social work needs to be mindful that people with disabilities may be in their programs. And even those that they serve may have invisible disabilities and they need to be sensitive to those things because our code tells us we have to inherently respect the dignity and self worth of all people. I mean, if they're disabled, you have to really respect that.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Thank you so much. One, I just want to take a moment in the middle, a little shout out and appreciation to so many Black faculty at universities across the country who really support and help. I'm hearing about projects, I'm hearing about the ways that they're helping you support your education with scholarships. I had a graduate assistantship because there happened to have been a Black faculty person at my school who allowed me to fill that space or I'd be in a lot more student loan debt. So just such an appreciation for those folks who really help us get through the program. And we would not, many of us, would not be successful without their support. Dashawna?

Dashawna:

Yeah. So I want to talk about diversity and intersectionality. And so just because André was the last to speak, I want to make sure ... I want to pick up there, because he made me think about something. Like, yeah, I talked about the intersection of me being a Black woman, and I don't know how I forgot about this, but maybe because I'm doing a good job of handling it. But I also was diagnosed with several mental illnesses during my first year of my doctoral program. And that has been interesting. Number one, I'm a Black person who does mental health research, and therefore knows the stigma attached to the fact that I have these mental illnesses, and have to ask for accommodations for them. And having to understand that because it's an invisible disability, that people may be like, "Oh, well, why do I have to give you this extension? Why can't you just like feel better?"

Dashawna:

Or "What does it really mean for you to be telling you that you're in a depressive episode?" And comparing me to other Black people in my program who have not ... openly admitted feels weird, to have any type of disability. So that's like you're saying, "Well, this Black person is doing this and this and this, has done this and this and this, has this many publications, has this much funding. And you're over here struggling, what's going on?" Ma'am I have depression, anxiety and PTSD. I'm really trying.

Dashawna:

And then on the other hand, that kind of folds into, talking about diversity, is that I've realized that social work education really benefits from thinking that, or having a typical or ideal type of Black person. There

have been several occasions where I've been told to just chill or just to fly under the radar. Just keep your head down. I don't want to keep my head down. I want to be me. I don't want to feel as if I have to make myself smaller. And that's why, especially recently with George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, I just got fed up with social work education. I said, "You guys are telling me to keep my head down and to just chill, to just be quiet, just get through my programs," and all that jazz. But you're really not here for me.

Dashawna:

And that's why when the situation with George Floyd happened, I just got really fed up and started to go public and say, "Listen, I see that social work programs are not speaking out. I see you not talking, you not talking, you not talking, you not talking. And you want my dues later this year and I'm not going to give them to you. And in two years when I'm on the job market, I see you ain't put out no statement. Oh, I don't know. I don't know if that's where I want to go." And there are people who are like, "Well, Dashawna you might want to temper that down because you don't want it to negatively impact you."

Dashawna:

Again, if you could not just put out a statement, I didn't even say you had to do anything. If you couldn't even just put out a quick tweet that said, "Black Lives Matter." I don't want to work with you. That's it. Instead of trying to quiet me down and make me fit into the mode of your ideal Black person, how about you get yourself together and really show that you hold true to our code of ethics. And staying true to what we say we're about, that you uphold social justice, because everybody has that in their mission statement these days.

Dashawna:

Because everybody has that in their mission statement these days. So make sure that you're really out here seeking social justice and seeking racial justice. And that you're about what you say you're about. Instead of trying to get all Black students and Black faculty members and Black staff members to react the same way and not cause trouble and not cause drama and not be too angry and not ask for too much by asking you to rethink about your curriculum and your syllabi.

Dashawna:

And to just not be quiet, I don't want to be quiet, I want to be me. Not to say that there's anything wrong with being quiet, but I just want to be able to be who I am as a social worker and have that autonomy that we espouse and not be punished for it via gatekeeping.

Dashawna:

So if we could just do that and accept the diversity that is present in our experiences in the ways in which we react and the ways in which we engage in activism and the way in which we engage in social work, that would just be great for Black students and non-white students.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Absolutely, code switching. We don't always want to, it's not always something we should have to do. So that brought to my mind, and I probably should have asked this at the beginning, but why did you choose social work? What made you want to come to social work and then even were there elements or pieces to the schools that you chose to attend?

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

You don't have to say the school, you can be as vague as you want to be, but were there elements, were you looking for Blackness in choosing the schools of social work that you chose to attend? And just how was your search in looking for Blackness as you came to realize you wanted to be a social worker? Vivian.

Vivian:

To be honest, I was one of those students that didn't do my homework, I can admit that. I will say what made me choose social work is that I was working as a case manager at the time. And I was getting a lot of job offers, without looking, to be either a wraparound specialist or the program coordinator. But unfortunately those positions required a social work degree and it kept coming up, like in a short amount of time, I was being told, "Hey, you should look into this school of social work and this one." And I just loved my mentor so much from undergrad that he told me, I either could go to U of M or I could go to, what's the other school? It's far away, just know that it's far away, he gave me two choices. And so I was like, well, I'm from Ohio, that school is three hours away I could go there, call it a day.

Vivian:

And I also was attracted to their child welfare program because I wanted to work in child welfare, being a product of the child welfare system specifically, and then seeing a lot of the gaps from the ecological standpoint. So I wanted to be in a policy arena, as well as the program arena in designing programs that were more youth centered specifically for those who were in the foster care portion.

Vivian:

And so I applied to the scholarship program, got denied, it happens, not going back to that whole gatekeeping stuff, but I stuck with it anyway because I'm like, well, I'm already here per se. And there are some good life lessons and friends that came out of my program.

Vivian:

Truthfully, I didn't want to be a social worker only because I had a negative experience. And then it was hard for me to identify what social workers, as somebody that is raised in the system, but for the work that I wanted to do and that I was good at doing, I knew that social work was the only degree, at least I was told, that the social work degree was the one I needed to have.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yeah. Thank you. Deana.

Deana:

So I got into social work and was interested in majoring in social work because I just kind of looked up, what can I major in to help people? And it was just this very vague, idea of wanting to help people.

Deana:

And while I love the idea of social work and I love the idea of the social work education. I definitely went into starting college at the idea that I wanted to do macro social work. And I wanted to talk about systems to tackle creating racial justice and economic justice.

Deana:

And as I got into the program and actually started being in the classroom, it was clear that that's not what my cohort really was interested in. And that's how my professors were interested in teaching.

Deana:

So I had already started off pretty progressive, but as I continued in college and got involved in student organizations and student government and campus organizing, I was more and more passionate about the big picture solutions to these problems and systemic solutions and systemic change.

Deana:

And I feel like while I enjoyed parts of my social work education, that was never touched on, it was like, okay, it's cool that you want to do that. And that was never fostered or mentored. And I think part of it is that I was very much perceived as the stereotype of put together Black girl who does all their homework ahead of time and doesn't need support because they can do the research themselves, when that wasn't necessarily where I was.

Deana:

And so those stereotypes and a lot of just not caring about the advocacy I was doing, to me being I still love the idea of social work, especially radical social work, but I'm very hesitant about going back and getting my master's because the research on social work that I did and what I thought that the jobs available in the profession was especially the past two months, and throughout my program have really shown me that that's not necessarily meshing.

Deana:

So I'm coming to terms with the fact that social work isn't as a profession in the United States right now, isn't where I want it to be. And then deciding does that mean you stick with it and stay and get another degree and eventually teach, which is what I used to want to do, or just ditch it and go do public policy.

Deana:

So I think that's... I've noticed a lot of people who are really interested in policy and justice oriented in social work are very... Realizing that the way that the profession is advertised isn't necessarily what you'll get once you start in the education and get into practice your work.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

I hear you. And I will say that for me, that's an area that I feel saddened by. I often see students go to policy work and in other areas of study, which are valuable areas of study, but I see a passion for social work, social justice. But I think that what we call macro too often looks like nonprofit management and not systemic change. I would say polite advocacy, not the messy stuff, not the grassroots stuff.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Dashawna, you want to talk about even your research and why you came to social work and what you're doing?

Dashawna:

So my path to social work is interesting. I was a clinical psych... I was a psych undergrad who was planning to go onto a clinical psych program. I got a summer fellowship the summer before my senior year. And the chair of the department in a summer lecture said, if you want to help people, if you say you want to help people on your clinical psych PhD applications, you're not going to get in.

Dashawna:

And I was like, but I do, I do want to help people, that's why I do this. That's why I'm doing all of this. And so one day my research mentor in undergrad called me into her office and said, "Dashawna, your questions about mental health disparities and why some kids get treatment and some kids don't get treatment, they're not really clinical psych, they're more social work". And I realize now that that conversation was tinged with racism, but it's cool, because I ended up where I was supposed to be. Because there are plenty of clinical psychologists. Well, there are some that study mental health disparity. So it wasn't a complete, "Oh my God, you were in a completely wrong field," but that's neither here nor there.

Dashawna:

So that's how I ended up in social work. I was again, as a first gen, I didn't have anybody to tell me no, Dashawna don't do that. So when people would say, "Oh, Dashawna do that," I just do it.

Dashawna:

And so she was like, yeah, those questions that you have about why Black kids are less likely to get treatment is social work. And so I was like, well, I guess I'm not going to be a clinical psychologist anymore. I guess I'm going to be a social worker. And so I just jumped all of that, even though I have extensive research experience, was really training myself to be ready for a PhD program in clinical psych. I just said, "Oh, well bump that, social work it is."

Dashawna:

And so again, being a first... and it's funny, I was just talking to my parents about that today or yesterday about how my approach to my social work education has been, "Oh, you got in?" go.

Dashawna:

And so it wasn't, Oh, it was Black faculty or it was, Oh, I got into a school, I can go anywhere I want to go, bam, just go, not thinking it through.

Dashawna:

And I talked to my parents, I'm like, "why y'all just letting me just go to these places?" "Why would y'all do that?" Because I ended up in these really white places and I'm like, "y'all just didn't even say nothing, y'all just was like, bye Dashawna. Bye." Literally dropping me off, moving me in and saying bye, y'all knew y'all set me up.

Dashawna:

But that's what happens when you're first gen, your parents they so proud of you and they just like, it's going to be okay. And then when you call them and be like these people is racist they're like, "Girl, just do it, you can do it", because they don't know what you're going through.

Dashawna:

And so like, that's kind of how I have approached my education is just, especially now, what I realized is I've gone to top programs and like, that was the only fact that, "Oh, that's a good school." The current city I live in, I knew nothing about it. I was like, "Oh, I got in and they got money, they're paying me, so let's go."

Dashawna:

And now I know I was just talking to my mama about this yesterday, now I want to be more intentional about where I end up next. That's why I'm not afraid of any blow back from anything I post on Twitter, because if you cannot support me as a Black woman in social work academia who just wants the best for Black kids and Latinx kids. Because I'm originally from Miami, Florida so I feel a certain community with the Latinx community.

Dashawna:

So if you can't support me, you can't validate me, you can't uplift me or you don't have space to support me and just let me spread my wings as a Black female academic that I don't really want to be on your faculty.

Dashawna:

Even if I'm the only one on your faculty, which I would hope not, especially since I'm giving y'all forewarning now, I'm going to be on the market in two years, I got to get some people to be with me, that'd be great. But I have some really amazing mentor, shout out to Dr. Campbell.

Dashawna:

I want to be more intentional because I want support. I don't want to be miserable. I don't want to be constantly upset because people are saying racist things to me. I don't want to be constantly upset because people are doing microaggressions, that aren't really micro.

Dashawna:

I don't want to have to, I stay in trouble often and it was the same at both of my institutions. I stayed in trouble often because I can't keep my mouth shut about injustices. I can't keep my mouth shut about racial slights, I'm from the hood in Miami. So I don't tolerate disrespect, this is not happening.

Dashawna:

And so I just don't want to be in an environment as I move forward because it's not good. Number one, it's not good for my future career trajectory is going to stunt my work. And number two, it's just not good for me personally, it's not good for my mental health.

Dashawna:

And as a mental health researcher, I'm really mindful of that. That's one thing that COVID has put into perspective as we don't talk enough about mental health. So we don't talk enough about what minor things can impact mental health, the impacts of racism on mental health, the impacts of oppression on mental health, especially for our youth.

Dashawna:

And those are the things that I want to do now. Like adults are adults and there are people out there who do the work for adults, but I'm really about making sure that Black and Brown kids have the tools they need to be successful and to be happy and as mentally healthy as possible before they become adults. And yeah, that's kind of my thing now.

Dashawna:

So I got into social to work through some racism and now I make sure that I nip that in the bud. And I want to make sure that Black kids, especially those in the inner city who experience... who some will say, experience the impacts of racism the hardest in their communities are not left out in the cold to develop anxiety and depression and not get it diagnosed, and not get it treated.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yes. André.

André:

So what brought me to social work is it wasn't anything... I wasn't the cliche, I want to help people. And so I majored in social work, no shade to anyone, because some of my participants here have said that, which is a wonderful thing.

André:

We were frowned upon in my program. We could not say, if we said we wanted to help people, they would look at us, they made us say more than that. I think Dashawna kind of mentioned that.

André:

So I mentioned earlier that I have an invisible disability. So I live with sickle cell disease and I actually am a sickle cell disease survivor and a stroke survivor. So a lot of people don't understand that I'm disabled because I don't carry myself as disabled, but I do have some residual effects from the stroke. So I have been very active in the advocacy space as a sickle cell advocate.

André:

And so very quickly, I'm going to share just a little bit of my story. So when I was first in undergrad in 2007, after I graduated high school, my major was mass communications. I absolutely hated it.

André:

I went to college and for some reason I allowed my parents to peer pressure me into pick a major. And they always told me growing up, I had the gift of gab so they thought I should be a mass communications major. So I could be a news reporter or the next Black male Oprah. And I'm like, "Oh, okay, whatever." I just did whatever they told me. So I majored in mass communications, I hated it.

André:

And so I ended up getting very sick in school, ended up in ICU for like almost a month. And when I came out and I tried to return back to school, my school was like, no, I'm sorry, but you've been gone way too long.

André:

And so that was also around the time of housing crisis of 2008 and just the financial decline and so my parents were like, we can't afford to keep you here because it was a private college, PWI private college.

André:

So I ended up walking away from school and I stayed out of school for like five or six years. And within that time I was... In order to do something with my time since I was in school, I started working and then I would get sick again and I couldn't work, so I would be at home. And so I started volunteering at my local sickle cell organization a little bit more.

André:

And so now that I didn't have no job, I didn't have no school to go to. I was able to go to sickle cell conferences. And so I would just go to conferences and meetings and everything, I went to everything just to participate.

André:

But then after a while, like Dashawna said, when things were problematic for me, I started to speak up. And so I kind of just stepped into the position of advocate. And so I started consulting pharmaceutical companies.

André:

I ended up getting three or four certifications and licenses that really enforced my education as an advocate in the political space. And then I started working with my state government and the federal government about healthcare policy and especially with sickle cell disease.

André:

And so that's how I kind of started getting interested in macro social work, but I didn't know what it was. And so when I finally went back to school I was trying to decide a major and I knew it wasn't going to be mass communications and I took one of those career tests at the career center and then I actually had thoughts of doing sociology, but someone told me you are a macro social worker, you've been doing this, and I was like, "yeah, you're right." And I applied to my program and I got in and the rest is history.

André:

And then specifically what brought me, if I was looking for Blackness in the program, I guess it kind of answers itself because I went to a HBCU. So there's of course an inherent level of Blackness you're going to get in an HBCU that you're not going to get anywhere else.

André:

And I appreciate that lens because I learned a lot of things as a Black person that my counterparts who did not go to HBCU didn't learn or they just didn't get that experience as a student at PWI, I was at PWI for two years I hated it. The social life was amazing, we clubbed and partied all the time, that was fun, but I didn't learn anything, I was not academically enriched, I wasn't just nothing, my academics were trashed and professors were trash, everything was trash.

André:

And again, going back to that peer pressure thing in this city, the school that I went to, everybody thinks it's like the cream of the crop only because it's a Christian PWI private school. And I'm a living witness to show that going to a public state HBCU is just as beneficial because I learned way much more at my public state school that was an HBCU here in this city than I ever did at the private Christian PWI that I went to.

André:

And then also I was a McNair scholar so there were a lot of opportunities that were available to me that were not available to me at the PWI.

André:

So when I was looking for schools, I really was looking for how many opportunities I will be afforded and every one of them was afforded to me while I was at my HBCU. I was able to travel abroad twice, I interned in DC, and in Florida. I was able to do a lot of things that I didn't even fathom I could do at the PWI one.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Okay. So just a couple more things before we wrap up. Everyone knows, I think we've all had that experience in that one diversity course, if you had more than one, celebrate your institution, but most of us have one diversity course.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

We talked a little bit about it earlier, but what your experience was like having the one diversity course, being a student in that space. Tell me just a little bit about your experience with that, Vivian.

Vivian:

For me, I lucked up with the professor that I got for my diversity course. To be honest, I didn't want to take it because my undergraduate degree is in nonprofit administration. So I had a lot of diversity classes already, but it's mandatory. And the professor, once again, I lucked up with, because I was already investigating who I was going to take. I'm not with the professors, that'd be with the BS. So I do my research of who not to take. The one time I didn't, it kicked me in my behind.

Vivian:

So anyhow, that professor was really great because the content was really diverse. In fact, I actually learned something, I learned more about the Jewish population that I've ever learned. I learned a lot about different critical race theories, about the Combahee collective, just so many things that I'd never knew of before, which allowed me to expand my knowledge base about the Indigenous anti-racism, ethnic cleansing the likes.

Vivian:

And I also appreciated the different tools that she used to teach. Like we listen to podcasts, we saw YouTube videos, we did all types of things which may... she was very diverse and she accommodated different students' learning styles. The downside of the class that she had no control over is of course my white peers.

Vivian:

In diversity classes they want us to talk about diversity and challenge ourselves and perspectives. It's not going to happen with white women. I often observed them being afraid to say anything and they'll even say, they're afraid to say things because they're worried about BIPOC students attacking them for what they say or offending someone, but like, you guys already do anyway, just keeping it real.

Vivian:

And as far as starting stuff goes, yes, I was the stuff starter, trying to use clean language today and I will just say some things to try to get them to talk because that's just how I am. I am a talker and I don't want to come to this class and be the only one providing education. I'm asking a white woman, so what do you think about that? Or why do you think that way? And they... sometimes it ended up good sometimes it didn't.

Vivian:

But as far as my peers experience in that diversity class, it was horrible because going back to a lot of white instructors, not feeling comfortable with teaching content that centers Black and Brown bodies, not having a diverse syllabus. And it's also the issue of I'm observing some schools such as mine, will hire new professors, I want to say assistant professors, I may be wrong in saying that, but they're mandated to teach this entry level course in order to teach the other classes, right.

Vivian:

So a lot of them are teaching content, they're not even well briefed on to students, right. And I think that's one of their bigger problems. And so people typically walked out of that class. They actually built a curriculum career committee to try to restructure the class and make it uniform, and of course it's still not working.

Vivian:

And honestly, I don't know if that's the class for BIPOC students all the time, because the BIPOC student body there is so small, that is actually violent for us to sit in those spaces with our white peers. But I love Professor Louise.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Is there anybody else want to share their experience with that diversity course? Yeah, Deana.

Deana:

So at my university, our diversity course was online and I think there was only one person in my entire cohort who took it in person and that's because she was taking her classes out of order.

Deana:

But it was, I think most people just cheated the entire class because it was online. It was based out of a textbook and it was very, just read the little module on Canvas and then keep it pushing. It wasn't anything that actually engaged us and so then to me, I had to balance between, okay, I have a bunch...

Deana:

So then to me, I had to balance between... Okay, I have a bunch of other stuff that I needed to spend time on... And okay, is anyone else actually going to put effort into these online discussion questions? And so, I was spending all of this time, typing these long answers, and responding to people. People were just like, "I've never thought about people, having disabilities before," and just no effort being put in. It just reflects on how... I think a lot of social programs aren't putting effort, into even teaching the basics of diversity, and then we're asking them to make decisions about racial justice and racial equity. And it's like these professors are making conscious decisions, to not require more of these classes.

Deana:

I think the final project for our diversity class, because it was online, was like, you could either do volunteer hours, and play an online simulator, that was about life and the differences between people, or make the equivalent of a Wikipedia page, about a different group of people than yourself. And so, because I cared about it, and I wanted to do it, I ended up doing that Wikipedia page. But there weren't enough people in my cohort to even... It was supposed to be a group project, if you did the Wikipedia page. There weren't enough people who were willing to put in the effort for me, to do it as a group, so I did it by myself, because I wanted to learn more. I focused on a different country, and learning about the diversity there, and the impacts on religion and ethnicity there. But it was just like, "How are we going to expect..." I was like, "If we're not asking my cohort, and my peers to do more, we're not going to get it."

Deana:

If everyone is so busy, and you're asking us to put in the bare minimum of, read about racism, two paragraphs, and watch a video, and then google the answers. They're not even going to read the paragraphs, and watch the video. And so, it was just a very bare minimum effort, into talking about diversity, which I think is very reflective of an incident in my cohort where, I think it was the Dean of our program was saying something, and I was like, "Do you not realize that you have more power in this situation?" And she was like, "Oh well, as a white lesbian..." And I was like, "You have a salary, and half the people in this room have student loan debt."

Deana:

So it was just very interesting that... Okay, we understand identity and representation, but not necessarily what diversity actually is, the power that comes behind that. And I think it's just... Like the fact that we had that online class, and then that happened, and it was one-to-one, it was in front of my entire cohort. It was just very reflective of what that actually meant to them, and I don't think that was just my university. I think that's something a lot of people can relate to.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yeah. Keep going with the same thing. But I wanted to ask you guys, has anyone had any focus... Or can anyone remember a time in their class work, where you've learned about, or talked about whiteness, explicitly?

Dashawna:

No.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

No? [laughter] Oh, so-

Vivian:

[inaudible 01:21:14]. It's a resounding, "Hell no."

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Well, we talk about everybody else, but whiteness is just normal other, we just... No learning about whiteness, because every time we talk about something-

André:

You don't have to learn about what is normal.

Vivian:

Exactly. And it's odd because we be having white clients, you know I am not prepared to have a white client [laughter] [inaudible 01:21:40]. I don't know what to do.

André:

But if I can say Charla, I think that's a great point though, because in order for us to be... And I'm thinking about the question in my diversity class, the word cultural competence was beat in us. The term culturally sensitive was beat in us, but are we culturally sensitive? Or culturally appropriate? Or culturally... Are we serving our white clients? But then, it goes back to what I said before though, is that theories, and the things that we're taught, is normalized by white people anyway. So if we implement the theory that was written by a white person, and tested on white people, and it has a track record in the white community, we take it, and throw it on them, it's going to work, it's going to produce results.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

And what will [inaudible 01:22:40] produce?

André:

That part-

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Studying whiteness within white supremacy, and maintaining white supremacy that was used exactly as it is, what would it produce regardless?

André:

But then also, if you think of it this way, this is another thing that I'm bursting forward in education. So you were given, I guess, an antidote to say, you can have a theory that was created by white people for white people, but even you as a Black person, you provide a filter. You think of the filter, a water filter or whatever, so whatever filter, that catches things. So, that theory is going to go through your Black filter.

André:

And so, there's still going to be some type of Blackness... There's going to be a hand print, or some type of fingerprint in that theory, from our own, lived in personal experience, how we apply it, how we conceptualize it, how we digest it. I mean, I'm sure that's a whole different thing we could talk about.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

André, you've got my brain going crazy because, if it's filtered through, then how is it assessed? Like if our assessors, and our educators were assessing the way that I, as a student learner, take in CBT, but I'm processing it through the filter of my Blackness, and [crosstalk 01:23:59].

André:

Of course.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Then how is my professor going to assess my work? You're pushing me. Thank you.

André:

Yes.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Love this.

André:

And see, I think these are conversations that are very necessary because again, with my lens from a HBCU, these are the conversations that we had, because we have practitioners who were our adjunct professors, and they were saying, "Well, I had a white client named Billy..." and blah, blah, blah, and this at work, or, "I had a Black client named Daquan, and applying this show wasn't our work." And they taught us how Daquan was about to sit there, and lay on a chase, for three hours, and talk about... We could go on and on about how CBT is not always the best option for Black communities. We could go on and on about a whole bunch of these other theories, that should not be the go to, when we do therapy with Black people.

André:

But again, I'm not micro, so my stomach hurts when I think about that. But going back to what you were saying, I had one diversity course... one or two, but I appreciated that course. Again, as someone who lives with disabilities, we were taught a lot about intersectionality of disabilities, of race, of ethnicity, and the fact that a lot of people who were non-people of color, who didn't even know that there's difference between race and ethnicity in college, I just couldn't wrap my head around that. And to me, I was like, "This is..." And it was always the white.

André:

So how we are in PWI, is how we're the chocolate chips, the white kids at the HBCUs, are the white chocolate chips. And there's always a white chocolate chip in the HBCU class, always. And so, it was funny to see even then, how their privilege would still come out, and I may not miss a difference

between race and ethnicity... Yeah, there it is. You get identified as one racial group, and then have the whole different ethnicity, vice versa. But anyway-

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Shout out to our Black Latinx.

André:

Yeah, yeah. Of course. And so to me, that class was important because, it blew their mind that you can have all of these things co-mingling to create your identity. And so, I really appreciate it. I loved that class, because I used to get on people's nerves, because I will always be the one I guess, that would play devil's advocate, and always say, "Well, if you have a problem with someone who's getting an abortion..." and blah, blah, blah. I'll always talk about the controversial intersectionalities, that people don't like talking about. I think that's very important. And so, I think that's why I liked my diversity course, because it wasn't... It didn't just speak to, "Oh, Black means this, and white means that." It wasn't just about Black and white.

André:

When we talked about religious culture, even within that religion, there's certain subtexts in culture. Food culture, that is a big thing. Some people's... Which is influenced by their religion, what they can and cannot eat, really influences how they live, the culture, their music. There's just so much that we don't think about, when we think about diversity, and we always go back to race. But race is just one big part of it, but race is not the only part that we should be thinking about, when we talk about diversity. I learned so much about differently abled people. I even felt that because, even though I was somebody with disabilities, I didn't know as much as I should have. I learned about the hard of hearing community about, not using... How some people in the community, use the lowercase d, and then some people want to use the uppercase D, that never came across my mind, but because of that class, I learned that.

André:

And why is that? Because I had a professor who worked at a Deaf college, Gallaudet University, and because of her experience, she was able to bring that back to us. So I think those are some amazing things to say, is that, diversity courses should go beyond the racial aspect, and really get into intersectionality of what people are. I can be... Me and Charla are two Black people, but I'm sure we're... Even though we're a lot alike, there's a world of difference between us, and it has to be understood.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yes. Yes. So we have talked for a really long time. It's been great. I just want to wrap it up with a couple of things. Last question I guess, what do you guys want schools of social work to know? If you were a dean or a director, what changes would you make? How would you change your hiring practices? What would you like to see a part of the curriculum? The funding? The university structure? How would you like to see schools engage differently with the community? I know this is really loaded. How would you like them to address the peers? Admissions? Just some key, really quick ways that you... Some takeaways that you want deans, directors, school leaders, social work educators to know. Dashawna?

Dashawna:

The most important thing is, I want them to be intentionally anti-racist. Your school environment would be much better for it. Especially at the doctoral level, things can be toxic just because of the culture of

academia, outside of the culture of social work. You need to be explicitly anti-racist, look for ways to go out of your way, and support students of color, support Black students, support first-generation students. Just to piggyback on the diversity class, try and not make it a buffet type of style, "Oh, this week we're going to learn about Asian Americans, and this week we're going to learn about disa..." Let's not do that.

Dashawna:

Let's be intentional about that course. Let's really call our students to think critically. Let's think about what readings we're assigning. Let's think about differently abled students, and how some students may do well with the readings, but some students may benefit from multimedia. So videos, and even pictures, and music videos, and really incorporating, and being innovative in the way in which we present information, so that all students can benefit. But like I said, the most important thing to me, intentionally being purposefully anti-racist, anti-sexist, against white supremacy, intentionally searching for racial justice, and social justice.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Deana?

Deana:

I thought about this a lot, and I think the biggest thing is for... A lot of social programs need to take a hard look at themselves, and go back to the roots of our profession, as being radical, and looking at the roots of all of these social issues that we're claiming to work on and fix. And so, part of that is hiring professors, that have lacquer experience, hiring plaque professors, trans professors, queer professors, disabled professors. And I think a really big one, is teaching from a Black queer feminist lens, and an anticapitalist lens, so that we're actually getting to the root of these issues that we're talking about, and we're not just running around in the same circles that we've been going around in.

Deana:

And then, other things like advocating for paid seal practicum, so that people aren't going into debt. And then another big one for me is, focusing on action research, so that we're not just studying the communities that a lot of Black and Brown students are from, and saying, "Okay, cool. Now you can get a grant to study them." And also, stipends for your housing walls, and not getting anything back. So focusing more on, if we're social workers, and we're going to be doing research, and focusing on these communities, and any problems that are there, that we're helping them solve those problems, and making sure that there's equal benefit from whatever we're doing.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Vivian?

Vivian:

I would like to go, and highlight the field placements as well as mentorship. I think that's something that's really lacking. When I think about some of the social work programs that we noted, where is the shadowing? Where is the career exploration, to know where your skills align best in social work? Because for me, my experience was that my program was heavily focused on micro. I didn't want to be a therapist, I already knew that going into the program. I knew that I'm a big picture thinker. I was

advocating for policies for foster care youth for years. And it just seems like the program, they market a macro lens, but it's really not there. It's still being built.

Vivian:

And so, I would like to see a lot of programs, be more inclusive of macro practitioners. Some of what I see at USC, as well as Columbia, I'm like, "Dang, I chose the wrong school." Yes, I said it. Mainly because, it's one thing to have this degree, and as a macro practitioner, we have to market ourselves differently, in terms of, we can go into many different fields. But what does that look like? And have we educated our potential employers about what macro social workers can do? I don't really see that. And then moving on to mentorship, when it comes to being a marginalized student, particularly those with multiple identities, as well as first-gen, I would like to see a big push of faculty and staff, going out of their way, to find some mentorship and supports for those students.

Vivian:

And it needs to be beyond financial support. It really shouldn't be moving to them, in a place of being a good professional, because oftentimes, when we see those who get mentorship, those are the students that know how academia works, they know how to navigate it. But for those that don't, why is it so hard to teach them? Why is it so hard to have a first-gen seminar, about the do's and don'ts of academia? Why is it so hard to pair them with faculty? And it doesn't have to be Black.

Vivian:

Because truthfully, if we know that white people are the gatekeepers, you should probably try to be more intentional about making sure that marginalized students are building relationships with white practitioners, as their network is much more bigger to get us a job, because to be graduating these programs without a job, is frustrating. And we can already see the differences, seeing my white peers got a job like that, and then for the first-gen, or other students with marginalized identities, they're still looking. And it shouldn't be that way when you go to top schools of social work, that work on themselves as number one. Where is the support? So that's something I would like to see change, as well as the funding gate keeping.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

André?

André:

Y'all be asking some real loaded questions. Oh, I will have to agree with Vivian, and I know this goes beyond the Black experience. But I even tweeted it today, as someone, like Vivian said, I have never been a micro social work person ever. Never wanted to do it. Even when I had to be in a micro setting for placement, I learned because I had to, and I got what I needed, but I hated it. I want to see more opportunities, first of all, for funding, for macro social work students, because I... Y'all correct me if I'm wrong, but I have yet to see a macro social work focused scholarship. All the scholarships I've seen, you had to be focused in mental health, or clinical direct practice. And every time I look for a scholarship to apply, I'm ineligible.

André:

So I think more scholarships should be in the macro space. But then I also think, and this is one of the things... Again, now this will be a shameless plug. One of the reasons I'm very excited about the future of

Black men in social work, I want to be able, at some point, to have some type of program where I could raise the money to fund Black men to come and get scholarships, to get a social work education, to make it accessible to them. And then create a center for social work education, from a Black lens. I think that's important. I think it's very important.

André:

A lot of us, I'm sure, are familiar... And I've meant to tell you Vivian, I was at NABSW... Well, I've been there the last three years, so I probably saw you, and didn't even know who you were, and I know Keith very well, who you mentioned, and we've worked together before, but I had to remember that [inaudible 01:37:34]. But NABSW, I think it's very important to be able to have those type of organizations more at the forefront, the main social work organization.

André:

I think it's necessary, but at the same time, I think that NABSW, and some of these other Black organizations, need to have the same type of clout in the social work space, to be able to support those students. NASW has its benefits, but I think that agencies, or organizations like NABSW, need to be able to be at the forefront for the students, and the practitioners that they support. So I think there just needs to be more support in those agencies, and they can support us. So more scholarships, more funding.

André:

If people always talk about... Here's my idea of how to answer this. Just like with the George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor situation, everybody wants to paint the street, Black Lives Matter. That's cute, and that's great, you can rename a street, you can rename whatever. But at the end of the day, what are you doing to change the policies? What are you doing to change the culture? So to me, for whatever, PWI, whatever school it may be, y'all can paint whatever Black you could change y'all, as pitch as Black, I don't care, but are you hiring Black faculty? Are you admitting Black students? Are you really concerned about how they're being treated in the classroom? Are you concerned about how they get there? How they stay there? What are the retention rates? Are you concerned about adding retention rates into that community of your school is low?

André:

Because, is Daquan walking to school because he doesn't have a car? And you're driving past him, you get to your office, and you don't care what's going on. And so, that's what I want to see change. I want people to actually put some skin in the game. I don't care about a black square where at the end of the day, if you're not going to change the actual framework, that the black square means nothing to me. Just like there's a city here in North Carolina that decided to provide economic reparations to the city, and I'm like, "That's nice, and that's cute, but where are my cheque? Yeah, I'm sorry, but where are my cheque? Other racial and ethnic groups get cheques, why can't I get one?" So that's how I feel in this whole discussion. Put your money where your mouth is, for real, just period.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

André, we're supposed to be wrapping up. Don't get me thinking about the lack of conversation about reparations, and social work education.

André:

I'm sorry!

Dashawna:

We need to do another podcast.

Vivian:

I know. This is going to be a two-part series, it could be a full series, okay?

Dashawna:

Let's talk about reparations, pay me my money. Thank you very much.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Yeah, talk about the whole economic justice that's missing in social work education. But yes, I hear everything that you're saying. I will state on that pledge with you and say, as we talk about... NASW should have more anti-racist language in their code of ethics, you know who already does? NABSW. And we should turn around, and look at the people who are already in the lead in those areas, and follow them, because Black and Brown folks have been doing this work for a long time. They are who helped us get to where we are, who help us get through this program, and we need to look to them, to figure out where we should go next.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

So thank you guys so much. Thank you for your vulnerability, for sharing your stories. You all are taking a risk just by being here, and being a part of this conversation, and sharing your truths with me and everyone else who's listening, and that is not lost. I want to make sure that you guys know that, that's really appreciated. And I recognize your bravery, to elevate the voices of Black folks in social work, and social work education. So thank you guys so much.

Charla Cannon Yearwood:

Before we go, I want to take the time to thank Shimon, who is the creator and host of this podcast normally, because he turned over his platform to a group of Black folks, to tell their story. What an excellent example of what social work practice should look like. To recognize your power and influence, and to turn over the spaces where you hold power and influence, to the people whose voices are missing, and instead of speaking for others, yielding your power. So thank you Shimon for doing the work, literally. Be blessed guys. Appreciate you.

Shimon Cohen:

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