

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.

Shimon Cohen:

I'm excited to let everyone know that we are now offering our Racial Justice and Liberatory Practice Continuing Education Series at Columbia University, Michigan State University, and the University of Houston. These classes are co-facilitated by me and Charla Yearwood, who has been a guest host and guest on Doin' The Work. Each course is three weeks long with online content and weekly one hour Zoom meetings. Our courses cover social identity, positionality, and defining racism; the history of racism in the United States and that it's always existed; White supremacy, White privilege, racism and oppression and social work; social movements, Black liberation, Black power and social work; using critical race theory and intersectionality and practice; racial justice and anti-oppressive practice; liberatory practice; and be prepared for backlash/where do we go from here. Check the links in the show notes to learn more and register. We'd love to have you.

Shimon Cohen:

In this episode, I talk with Dr. Maxine Davis, who is an Assistant Professor and the Chancellor's Scholar of Inclusive Excellence in Intimate Partner Violence Prevention & Intervention at Rutgers School of Social Work. Dr. Davis shares her experiences of the structural and interpersonal anti-Black racism, sexism, and oppression she experienced as tenure track faculty at her previous institution. She is incredibly vulnerable and opens up about when she attempted suicide due to the pain she was experiencing. We talk about specific examples of the varying attacks and racial assaults colleagues and administrators perpetrated on her and others, as well as the lack of any mechanisms for accountability or who you can go to when you've tried all forms of redress. This is an issue within individual institutions but also the larger social work profession and higher education as a whole. Dr. Davis shares details that she has not yet publicly shared. She also talks about her plan to create a Green Book, as well as a Red Book, so that faculty and scholars in the job market, particularly Black faculty and scholars, have much more information about these institutions prior to accepting a job offer. I hope this conversation inspires you to action.

Shimon Cohen:

Before we get into the interview, I want to let you all know about our episode's sponsor, the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. First off, I want to thank them for sponsoring the podcast. UH has a phenomenal social work program that offers face-to-face master's and doctorate degrees, as well as an online and hybrid MSW. They offer one of the country's only Political Social Work programs and an Abolitionist Focused Learning Opportunity. Located in the heart of Houston, the program is guided by their bold vision to achieve social, racial, economic, and political justice, local to global. In the classroom and through research, they are committed to challenging systems and reimagining ways to achieve justice and liberation. Go to www.uh.edu/socialwork to learn more. And now, the interview.

Shimon Cohen:

Hey, Dr. Davis, thank you so much. I feel like this interview has been such a long time coming. I know the listeners don't see us, but we can see each other as we're recording. I think we've, I don't even know if it was like two years ago, three years ago when we connected, but I'm really, really excited to have you here on Doin' The Work.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Thank you so much. It's an incredible honor, and I'm grateful to be here and to be invited to come have this chat and have a discussion that's been, like you said, a long time coming, and I'm so grateful that we met through Twitter and this is the epitome of, look at the power of Twitter, bringing people and community together, and giving people access to the resources of just having people they can call on outside of the isolation that can happen in your own institution or something like that.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. That's a really good point because Twitter can often be a total shitshow, but connecting with you and other folks who, like you just said, for me, it was really critical in breaking through isolation I was experiencing while I was going through stuff at a previous institution I worked at for many years. And I think one time I like posted about it, about being gaslit and things like that for speaking up around issues of racism. You were like, "Hey, I think we're going through some similar things. I have a whole thing I'm dealing with right now." I think that was like one of our first interactions that led us to really-

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Wow. Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

-kind of like supporting each other through this over the years. Yeah. And now I know you've gone public about your experience at your previous institution. There was a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Ed that highlighted you along with other faculty of color who have had similar experiences.

Shimon Cohen:

I want to first say that I know that there is so much you could speak about. You have expertise about so many things that we could be talking about. I'm totally up for that conversation too when you want to have that, but I know that this is something you've really wanted to have, get, to express your experiences. And I'm grateful that you are choosing Doin' The Work as one of the places where you feel comfortable to do that.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. That's real. These are not the type of conversations that I would feel comfortable going into a mass media setting type thing, because they don't provide enough nuance in space. And I, of course, don't want what I say to turn into a sound bit that's been circulated and distracts from the complexity of the problems in academia, especially for people of color and historically oppressed and marginalized populations. I'm so intentional with where I speak and what I accept and what I don't. I don't just talk to anybody, but especially about things that are this intimate and this important such as experiencing racism in unexpected spaces like social work and even higher ed in general. Some of the things that people encounters blows my mind because wait a minute, this is supposedly amongst the most

educated of our society, at least. Really overt and robustly horrific things are happening in spaces that theoretically shouldn't even be.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

But yeah. This is the right space, the right time, the right conversation. And yes, I've held back a lot. I often tell people, "For real. Ooh, whee. Y'all, be grateful." Be so glad that I'm saved, because so much of what I choose not to say really could completely end people's careers. And that's not my goal in the sense that wherever there's opportunity and space, I do at the core of myself, believe that people can change. And so there's a certain set of criteria that I allow myself to think about in terms of, if I'm going to name someone in the wrongdoing that they've perpetuated or not. And a large part of that is providing multiple opportunities for learning and correcting wrongdoing and doing things better or differently. And like I said, for example, the person who has a PhD in social work and touched my hair multiple times, despite me saying halt, I'm never going to name her, because she learned and changed her behavior in ways that I can express, because, it without her, but there was a transformation that was allowed to happen.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

It's pointless to me to deny people who are human, deny humans the opportunity for showing up better and creating a more healthy environment. If every single time we shame people and out them, then I think that breaks down opportunity for growth. So I'm not a big, bad monster like some people claim or want to portray me to be. Like I said, there's a lot that I haven't shared and that I won't because it's not necessary. It distracts from the egregious things that need to be dealt with. So just because I've shared a lot, I want people to know it's still only a very small percentage of what I experienced and what I choose to share is strategic for good reason.

Shimon Cohen:

I hear that a hundred percent. Let's get into that. Let's get into your experiences at your previous institution. I've seen you explain it as anti-Black racism, as sexism, as misogyny. But I, of course, those are things that I've seen you describe it as, and this is the opportunity to really hear it. People can hear it directly from you. They're going to be listening or reading on the transcript, your words about this.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. And the heterocentrism of it all too, that happened just as quickly as the anti-Black racism occurred and being in the thick of witnessing live anti-Asian racism occurred nearly as quickly as anti-Black racism did. The anti-Black racism I talk about more so than anything else, because it showed up as the most egregious and perpetual across different spaces and places, and in different ways. The other types of abuses were minimized or restricted rather to particular context and were not as overt. They may have been a little bit covert. And I also didn't encounter them as much as the anti-Black racism. That I encountered over and over and over and over and over again, to the point where it became the most unbearable.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So that's why I talk about that the most, but it doesn't mean that the other stuff wasn't impactful. It absolutely was. It absolutely was. And the combination of all of those things, I want to be very clear on that. The combination of all of those is what led to me sharing the first line of my publication in Nature within the first three months on a tenure track at my former institution, I attempted suicide. And having

survived that serious attempt is miraculous. And I thank God every day for the opportunity to talk about these experiences in ways that allow people not to feel like they're alone or that they're by themselves, or somehow it's this is just happening to me. Nobody else is experiencing this, it must be me. And I'm open in talking about my experiences with attempting suicide and suicidal ideation in an important way, because I think... This happened despite socioeconomic status, community violence was not a factor, intimate partner abuse or relationship distress was not a factor, money was not a factor, access to healthcare, access to mental healthcare – all of this was not a factor. And I still wound up in a place that almost cost me my life.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And I think that that conversation really needs to be understood and digested when thinking about risk factors for suicide and what suicide prevention looks like. Suicide prevention in academia looks like stop being anti-Black. Stop touching people's hair. Stop criticizing me for the way that I talk in using African American Vernacular English and not code switching every moment. All of those things are suicide prevention. And I think people don't really see their role in being able to improve health conditions by that. The last thing I want to say on that experience, I mean, feel free to ask me questions and talk about it more, but I don't want it to take over our conversation.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

The last thing I wanted to say about that though, is that arriving at that place, people might not understand what that feels like. And I'd like to share my experience with what it feels like. It feels like I just want the pain to stop, and it's not anything anybody could have done, or anyone I could have called, or anybody... The overwhelming feeling is I just want the pain to stop. So I offer that as a way for people to know that they're not alone and there are ways for the pain to stop without ending your life. So thank you for space to let me share that.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. I mean, first of all, and I've told you this before. I'm so glad you're here.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Amen. Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. And I appreciate how vulnerable you are about this, because it will help others. Because there's going to be people who have felt that way or feel that way, and hopefully that can help them. And then there's going to be people that I hope are in positions where they can change what they're doing so that they don't keep creating these conditions that leads to a successful Black woman professor feeling that way.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

Or anyone feeling that way. Could you share, and like you said, it's only going to be a piece of it because there's so much to it, but could you share some of the conditions, some of the things that happened at

your previous institution that led to that point where you were feeling like, I just want all this pain to go away. What were they doing? What was going on there?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Oh my gosh. Within the first few weeks it started, and I don't know how things would've been different if I truly were alone, but I wasn't even alone. I was hired in a cohort of seven people, almost half of which who have since left the institution. And half of us were Black. There were three Black professors, two of us have since left, and it was a diverse group. The cohort model in academia does help targeted groups not feel so alone. And part of the reason why I think things unraveled so quickly is because I had people to talk to and say, "Hey. They said this to me. Did they say this to you? Or I'm trying to access this resource. Do you have trouble accessing this resource too? Or my contract says I should get this, but the dean is telling me I can't get that. Huh?"

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Those type of things happened very quickly. And I might not have known the degree of what was occurring if I wasn't able to bounce off in a live sort of moment. Other people who did have the same exact contract as me or other people who was in the same space and place and setting as I was and heard things. And I just didn't have to process alone. I didn't have to process, did I hear that correctly? Am I tripping? And having that opportunity to engage with people who are also new to the institution and learning the current culture and realizing, yeah, it's not me. Everybody is noticing, that is some weird stuff going on, and this is not healthy. All of that happened very quickly. And I think part of why I was able to notice that is because of having the resource of being able to process with other people who were new also.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Some of the things that happened, again within the first few weeks was attending a faculty colloquium, and these were always so fun for me, from where I did my doctoral program at WashU in St. Louis. I had an amazing doctoral experience. After that, I have the very high standards of what doctoral education should be, because it was wonderful for me. And so entering into a space where I was immediately seeing that doctoral students were not being treated fairly or not having the full opportunity to the experience they deserve was really disheartening.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

When academia is interviewing—you know this process—when somebody's coming in for a job talk, they give this colloquium talk and faculty and sometimes students are there to listen. These were, at WashU, really exciting for me because it's like, this is the cutting edge research. Literally, this is about to be hot off the press of what somebody in our field is doing. And I'm eager to learn and engage and have conversation and critical conversation, too. This is the place to kind of work table, workshop some things that could be improved. This is the spot. This is the hub. So I was super excited to go to my first colloquium. It was on a Friday at like two. Hardly anybody was there, but I went to the first one, and that is where it all started. The talk itself was problematic in the implicit implications that the speaker was providing. And I don't know if she recognized it or not, but there was no way I was going to be in that space and hear those implicit implications and not question, or speak to, or bring up the potential danger of them.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So it took a very long time for me to even collect my words. And I actually wrote down my questions that I would ask, and read them. And they were scientific inquiry-style questions on theory and methods like any good academician does in science. And interestingly enough, half of the attendees were Black folks, and there's one Asian woman, and the rest were White. And when it came to the time for Q&A, all the Black people had questions, and we asked our questions, provided opportunity for conversation and response. And across the room, everybody had a feeling like, "Oh, this didn't go too well." Before we even went there, but not too long after the talk ended, one of the senior White women in the room sent out a message to the list server of over 50, 60, however many faculty. Again, most of which who weren't even there, but saying something to the extent of watch how you ask your questions when you go to colloquium. We want people to walk away thinking of this as a welcoming place. So just watch how you talk. Watch how you ask your questions.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And it gave the impression that somebody said something inappropriate or in a demeaning or problematic way when that was not the case at all. Anyway, so that was the first jab that happened because I got that. And I'm like the only people who asked questions were Black. Okay. So here's a White woman saying something about Black people's inquiry, and how it might not be appropriate or something. It was perplexing. Anyhow, that set off a series of then events and continued escalating violences that occurred beyond the tone policing itself.

Shimon Cohen:

Can I just jump in real quick?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

Sorry.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Go ahead.

Shimon Cohen:

Because I want to hear about all that, but I think even with what you're saying with this example, there's just so much with just this one example, because it's not, hey, we're going to think more carefully about who we bring and what their research is and what they're presenting about and make sure... There's no responsibility to that. It's, we're bringing in these people. You need to be nice to them, as if you weren't nice, and you need to be appropriate. And all these words that get weaponized, especially within social work, and then the people reading it, it's just kind of they have no idea what happened. So now everyone's just asking each other what happened, I'm sure. And it just gets filtered through all those layers. So I just wanted to...

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. Thank you for, exactly yes to all of that. I'll plug a resource here real quick is a book, it's in the distance so I can't get grab the primary author's name, but it's called Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies. And that book, in part, is what allowed me to survive until I found Twitter. And one of the things that the authors talks about is the tyranny of niceness in White academia. What's being said is dangerous about Black people. You're not going to say that you want us to be quiet, because you want to be nice.

Shimon Cohen:

Exactly. So it's just layer on layer of racism.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's so layered. Anyhow, that balloons... But it was the seed that unveiled a lot of stuff that was already there.

Shimon Cohen:

Of course.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

It just started the conversation. And in that same day, Shimon, that day was a Friday, I go from that colloquium to then around the office. Like, "Hey, did you get the email? What's your thoughts? And you were there."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And a senior person says, "Yeah. I was there. The questions were great. I'm confused. I don't know what's going on." But that's weird. That's not an appropriate email to send out.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

These informal kind of things happen. And so I make my way down the hall to the search chair who had brought the person in. And just a group of faculty, probably about five people standing around, just started to talk about, yeah, it didn't go so well. I don't further engage why. I'm just like, "Yeah."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Everybody's on the same page of, yeah, it didn't go so well. But our reasons are different. And those matter. But it wasn't the right space to engage why, especially after getting this email, telling me to shut up.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Anyway, this is less than 10 minutes from the talk. The search chair is informally having a discussion. She's a senior White person. The rest of us are junior. And we then talk about it a little bit but then move on to the rest of the search process.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

She then asks me about a candidate who's applying and who I've recommended to apply. And it's like, yeah, this is an amazing scholar. Yes. Absolutely. We should bring him in and all this. She proceeds to ask me his sexual orientation.

Shimon Cohen:

Wow.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Asks me a Black man's sexual orientation in a very disparaging way. She, and quote, said, "So is he gay or what?" And in that moment, I'm like, I literally just met this woman. I have no connection. There's no rapport.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And she's tenured and I'm not. And I have to say, in that moment, that is not... First of all, it doesn't matter. And second of all, what? That's not an appropriate question to ask. And even if I knew, I wouldn't tell you.

Shimon Cohen:

Right.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Then she pressed. Then she pressed and said, "Well, we were just asking because we couldn't figure it out." And I had to say, "Well, the way sexual orientation works is that you don't know when you see someone."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So here I am providing this one-on-one level... That was what? 10 minutes after the first and second. Yeah. Things like that happen on a regular basis. And I'm not going to not say anything in the moment. Because if you're doing this here, what are you doing in class?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And so if I don't say something, I'm failing to protect people in a way that I can't ignore. Without going into extreme detail, homophobia and heterocentrism was that drop that sent me over the top into my suicide attempt. It literally was the drop that was on top of the mountain.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And I'm a heterosexual. I identify as a heterosexual woman. I'm married to a man. I'm not even the most vulnerable of spaces and identities in that. Just to be honest, something that was related to that topic is that thing that literally took me over the edge.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So you cannot be so reckless that you think that it's less harmful to bring your oppression to someone who is not in a minoritized group because you don't know the complexity of who you're talking to. I'll stop there. I'll just stop there.

Shimon Cohen:

There's a lot to all that.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

There's a lot. And I think that people think, okay, I need to improve my behavior when I'm in the presence of historically oppressed people and be careful about how I treat them. Yes, that's true.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

But also, this has to be an internal transformative process that creates you into a healthier person, regardless of who you're in front of. Because you don't know what is beneath what you see. Only so much is skin deep.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

You cannot think that it's less reckless for you to be transphobic in front of cisgender people. That's not less reckless. You don't know. You don't know the impact that you could have. And so yeah, I want people to be more careful about how they treat Black folks.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah, I want people to be more careful about how they treat openly gay, bisexual, or otherwise sexual minoritized people. But I want you to just be careful in life. I need you to critically assess why you hurry up and lock the door when someone of a particular look walks past and you don't do it for someone else.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Those are the moments that will translate into healthier corporate and academic spaces. Because that's not about who sees me. That's about my behavior when I'm by myself. It's naive to think that that doesn't translate to behavior when you're around other people.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And so I am not immune to perpetuating anti-Blackness, and I'm a Black woman. So if I'm not immune, I'm going to need you to think, as a White person, that, yes, that's possible for you to do. And probably likely that you're doing that in some way, even if you don't recognize it yet.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

The "yet" is the potential and the hope. I think that people can become enlightened in ways that help them grow and contribute to a safer society and safer societies.

Shimon Cohen:

You know what? Just that Friday that you're talking about, it's this contrast of, if you bring up something about racism and you ask questions to this presenter, that's inappropriate. That's not nice. That's problematic.

Shimon Cohen:

But then if this other person says something... That person can then say whatever they want. Right? And ask this question in this disparaging way.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Then follow up with a justification.

Shimon Cohen:

Right. Which is also like, this is a hiring process. On top of just the common human decency about it.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Layers.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

That's illegal in some places. In some places, that is illegal.

Shimon Cohen:

So then how did things go from there? Because I know one of the things you've shared about has been what happened around tenure. But before we get to that, is there anything you want to cover that happened before that process? Or do you want to get into that process now? What happened with that.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Oh, gosh. Thank you for that important question. As I mentioned, there's a lot that has happened that I haven't always shared. But there are some things that I know that I will share at some point because they are so critically important for people to know.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And so I have selected our conversation today to provide you exclusive insight and the space for me to share something openly that I've never shared before about something really dangerous that happened. And I want people to know about it because it means that, one, it could happen to them. And two, this is how violence and abuse shows up in academia. Sometimes if people can't pinpoint examples, they find it difficult to understand.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

I decided fairly early on after that Friday and the subsequent faculty meetings that I was going to bring my full self, regardless of what the consequences or outcomes meant for tenure. And I said that in my very first faculty meeting. I said, "This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to continue bringing all of me.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And if that means I don't get tenure, it's fine. Because that doesn't define me. And the only way for me to stay true to myself and my roots is for me to just bring all of myself."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

I was encouraged in public. "Yes, bring all of yourself." And even on the side. "Yes, Maxine. Thank you. You're so vulnerable. You're so bold. Thank you. Yes." Current administration. "Please keep speaking up." All of the things that you would expect to hear. But of course, nobody's going to...

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Anyway, so there was something that happened. So from 2018 to 2020, I was all of myself, and unapologetically so, in a professional manner, because I care about people. Let me just breathe.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

After George Floyd was murdered, there was a recognizable silence from the administration, particularly the dean of my former institution in the School of Social Work. And being in that place of pain as a Black woman in America and as a mother of two Black sons, and having Black brothers and a Black husband, in the midst of COVID, there was no way that I was not going to say something.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And there was a long silence, noticeable, especially for the field of social work. And so the convention of the department was often to communicate over listserv and have conversations over listserv, which is not the culture of every department, but it was for this particular one.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And I simply said, "We hear the silence. The silence is deafening." I wouldn't say that the same way because now I think about that as potentially ableist framing.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

But I said something to the tune of, "The silence is deafening." And followed up... People knew what I was talking about immediately. But followed up with, perhaps we need to think about our power that we have as faculty in choosing our leadership. And maybe it's time to have someone...

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Implicitly, I said maybe I'm asking something that someone doesn't have to give. And as faculty, we need to think about, is this what we want? Do we want to have our administration be silent in moments like this?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

I said this. And not too long after, I was surprised to get a Zoom invitation request from the university lawyer. That conversation reflected the epitome of misusing university resources for personal gain because, painfully, what the lawyer told me and framed the conversation as, was that my dean at the time inquired about options of suing me for essentially critiquing him publicly on a public forum, which is a faculty listserv.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And characterized, essentially, my behavior to the university lawyer as harassing him and creating a hostile environment for him. Now, all of this is an email.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So the university lawyer tells me, "Dr. Davis, you're a very smart woman." Some of this is documented. So if ever there is the need to bring this to light, I have the receipts. I have the receipts. Let's just say that. And this was on a Zoom call. So let's put two and two together.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

But the university lawyer said, "Dr. Davis, you're a very smart woman. And I have been asked to review some conversations and materials. And from everything that I've reviewed, there's nothing that you've done wrong." And it doesn't rise to any level of action for harassment or creating a hostile environment towards my dean as a junior faculty member, my dean who presents as a White man.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And in that moment... At this point, I'm two years in. So much has happened. The pleasantries that I might have when first speaking to the University of Texas Arlington lawyer might have been a little different from what I said at this moment. But at this point, there had been a rapport built.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And I said, "Shelby." His name is Shelby. I said, "Shelby, are you kidding me? How do you encounter and deal with this on a daily? Are you okay?" And I said something to the tune of, "How do you deal with this?" And he said to me, "Maxine, it's been a very long nine years."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And that conversation, again, to me, was so powerful because it was an attempt at intimidation. It was an attempt of silencing me of being vocal about inter-departmental compliance with White supremacy and refusal to address anti-Black racism wherever it occurs. And it was a power play.

Shimon Cohen:

Absolutely.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And this is why it's important for me to share this verbally and not in a print sort of setting because this is a story that I only share in spaces like this where somebody can digest what's happening moment by moment. Because if I just say, "Yeah, my dean tried to sue me while I was on faculty for talking, for literally talking," I don't think people would understand.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

They might not even understand what that could look like or what that is or how that happens. But my understanding of all of that... And like I said, it's documented. That is 100% what happened.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And when I tell that story to people who have been in the game of academia for years, decades, they are blown away with the emboldenedness of someone to do such so flippantly. You know what I mean?

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. First, thank you for sharing that. It is so extreme and so ludicrous for the dean to do that. And I think part of the issue... Part of what's hard about these super toxic work environments that are beyond... There's layers of toxicity. Right?

Shimon Cohen:

Because there could be toxic work environments just based on interpersonal dynamics of people of the same race or gender or class and sexual orientation. And then you add the toxicity of, you've got racism, you've got sexism. You've got these layers of oppression that are adding to the toxicity and are embedded in it. So it's very hard to separate any of that out. It's just all boom.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

And then when people are sharing about it... And I've felt this way. And you tell me what you think. But I felt this way when I've written some stuff out about what I experienced where I was at.

Shimon Cohen:

When I read it or when I see the list of a couple of things, it doesn't even touch what it felt like or just what it was like to experience it. And so I just hope people listening can understand.

Shimon Cohen:

Because I think when you haven't gone through it... And I'm not saying I went through what you went through because we're different people, and the positionality and the dynamics are different. But I had our director say in a meeting that I was slandering them, the program. And I said, "No, I'm sharing my experiences." Because I was saying some stuff on Twitter of what was happening at the time.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

I got asked, "Is everything okay at home?" Because I'm upset that colleagues and administration aren't taking action about racism, that they're enacting racism and covering it up with social work lingo.

Shimon Cohen:

And so there are these similarities of that. And for people listening who haven't experienced it, I think it's very hard to understand what it's like to go through it. Because it ends up just being like, well, there was this and there was this, and there was this. But it's the daily stress of-

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And assaults.

Shimon Cohen:

Yes. It's violent.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. Yeah. It's the daily assaults that add up.

Shimon Cohen:

And it takes a huge toll. Right? You know. It almost took the ultimate toll for you. So this is new information because you haven't shared about this before, about being threatened with a lawsuit by your dean while you're faculty.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

With the university lawyer.

Shimon Cohen:

Right. So the university lawyer is going to take you to court.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. That part is really, I think, particularly important to pay attention to because even if that happened, that would not be... Even if this was a legitimate thing that occurred, that would be a personal litigation or there would be a filing of some sort of report.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

There was no filing of... No complaints were ever formally filed against me. All of the ways that you know of as an administrator to handle, if that truly was the case, all of that was obfuscated. And so that in itself tells you, just on a basic level, that there's some ulterior motive. Something else is going on with this tactic.

Shimon Cohen:

And this is before the tenure situation.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yes. Yes. So then this is the person who ultimately evaluates me and denies me the opportunity to continue on the tenure track in my mid-tenure review, despite having met and exceeded metrics that are laid out.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

It's super important that you highlight the relevance and possibility of this type of violence and abuse occurring amongst shared social positioned people. Hands down, some of the worst stuff, which I tried for the longest to not talk about.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

The most painful thing that I encountered across that entire time was experiencing the anti-Black racism from the only Black tenured administrator who was second in command under the primary dean, the Black woman associate dean. That hurts a different level. And people who've experienced that know exactly what I'm talking about.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And for the longest time, I wanted to protect... Black folks, if we have our stuff... The world is already thinking of us as one type of way. We're going to do everything we can not to bring our issues to light. But it got to that place in the tenure review where what she wrote was lies and characterized me in this angry Black woman trope that did not accurately reflect any of my behavior or any of my interactions. And then now I have a group of faculty members who wrote a statement to support me and verify my account of what occurred. But I did not want to talk openly about a Black woman's role in perpetuating and upholding the White supremacy and violence that her White male counterpart was largely facilitating. That was really hard. But once it presented in my tenure review materials, it became enough was enough. I had to say something and call it what it was.

Shimon Cohen:

So just to recap, you start working there, there's this situation where someone's presenting research in a way that's harmful to Black people. You and other Black faculty and colleagues who are there question it in the presentation and an email goes out. So basically the message is, don't speak this way, right? It's policing that. But then admin can say whatever they want, they can do whatever they want. So then when George Floyd is murdered and you bring up the silence of that, once again, you can't do that. You can't question leadership, you can't question administration, you get threatened with a lawsuit, one of the ultimate weapons to silence someone. And I know there's a lot within there that you're leaving out of all along that. And then you are denied the continuation on the tenure track and a lot comes up in that denial. I just want to make sure I'm recapping it clearly that there's this consistent message of silencing.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yes.

Shimon Cohen:

Right? And if you don't get the message, if you don't conform and get in line to the way things are done here, which are oppressive, then we're going to hurt you. We're going to hurt you. And when you're on tenure track, one of the biggest ways someone can hurt is to deny tenure or deny the continuation on that track.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. I mean, outside of academia, it translates to, for many people, you got fired because the consequence was that I could no longer work there after a follow-up grace year. And yeah, the general track of what you recapped is accurate, along with all the stuff in between. But yeah, those are the peaks of what occurred. And in between all of those peaks, at the very beginning, I met with the university president during my first year in faculty. And at the time it was a man of color and he did not hesitate to schedule me as soon as possible. And he was supportive in every possible way that you could imagine.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And when I told him about some of the stuff that was happening, he, along with the HR director, the three of us met together, affirmed that yes, that is strange, yes that is inappropriate. Actually there wasn't, "I can't believe that's happening," it was affirmation of, yes, none of this is okay. I now know that administration has for a long time known about what was happening, but was limited in what they could do.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

But that president, Karbhari, is the only president who met with me. After he resigned and the interims then took place, I continued to alert provosts at office level and above of things that were happening. The provost's office was helpful in certain circumstances and did provide support in the ways that they could, but things were so bad that I got to a point where I had to go to the provost's office to ask for the dean to put an item that I wanted to talk about on the faculty agenda. Usually when faculty just want to talk about an item in a faculty meeting, it's added. Nobody has to go to the provost for that.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. That's wow.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And it was about something particular at the school of social work that was about anti-Black racism potentially from a student. So of course I'm definitely going to stand up for students and this particular thing, we really needed to talk about.

Shimon Cohen:

They would not add it to the agenda for a faculty meeting?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Dean Scott Ryan, it's very clear, because sometimes it's they, and much of the time it was just him. And it's an email, yeah it's an email. This was one of the times that I think even the provost office was fed up. And the response that the provost representative gave, who's a full distinguished faculty member, said something to the akin of, "Are you kidding me? You can't even run a faculty meeting. We have a problem. Put Maxine's stuff on the agenda and leave me the hell alone." She did not say that, let me be clear. But this was the sentiment of the engagement and this is another place where he consulted the university lawyer apparently. At least that was what was in his response, there was something about, and she said, "We do not need to the university lawyer for Robert's Rules type of stuff." She did say in writing something to the akin of, "Aren't you tired of doing this to people?"

Shimon Cohen:

Wow.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Anyway, then the item was added and we talked about it. Shimon, there's so many things like that over time, over time, over time. And one of the first things I went to Twitter about was during COVID and everybody's transitioning to working from home and I needed some noise canceling headphones because I got two babies who I'm homeschooling and trying to catch up work and research and teaching and all the stuff. And I'm trying to order some headphones from the university website link. Anyway, I go to Twitter and I say, "Is anybody else having trouble ordering headphones? Headphones is a legitimate teaching research startup, what you would use your startup funds for, or am I tripping?" Because at this point I'm like, "Maybe I just need to check outside of my university."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And I asked, and Brittney Cooper, who's at Rutgers, who I now have pleasure of being on faculty with, who has written prolifically about anti-feminism and feminism and just being a Black woman, and just the whole nine yards. Brittney Cooper's work is really great. She replied back and was like, "Yep, sounds perfectly normal to me. Sounds legitimate." But the university lawyer was again brought in when I tried to order headphones and had to provide perspective on something as mundane as that.

Shimon Cohen:

They brought in the lawyer for you to order a pair of headphones for your work?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Scott D. Ryan.

Shimon Cohen:

I'm not questioning, I'm just saying like that is some-

Dr. Maxine Davis:

You can-

Shimon Cohen:

That is some real ridiculousness.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So this is another example and I'm glad we got to throw this in real quick, because one of the types of retaliation and forms of abuse that people think is not possible is like, if you have a contract, here's the contract, these are my startup funds, this is what I have access to, all of my startup package as someone on the tenure track is what I need to facilitate getting my research off the ground, or being set up in a new state, city, whatever, these are my equipment, all of this. It differs across the discipline, but it's specific to the type of work that you do. And as you know, on my research agenda, I have a core piece that looks at hip-hop music and I've done some work with high school Black and Afro-Latina girls.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Anyway, it fits within the requirements of what I need to conduct my work. But this is a very, very, very small example of someone who's behaving in an inappropriate way and being toxic in academia, preventing your access to resources. So this type of thing happened across a number of areas in my contracts and this type of thing, actually the access to our full summer salary in the first year and the access to the resources to hire postdocs and research assistants, I had to go to the provost's office, myself and another colleague had to go to the provost's office in order to serve as a mediator for the dean to give us what was in our contract.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And that, above everything else, I think is what much of this retaliation spawned from, because how dare you? I would have never known what to do in that process had it not been for Dr. Ryon Cobb who was on faculty with me at the time who knew academia very well and suggested, "I think we need to go to the provost." Because we tried to advocate for ourselves and get what was in our contract and he was the first person who said, "I think this is where we need to go in order to get this." And ultimately, we did get access to it, and I'll say this, of the seven of us, only myself and Ryon, we got the summer salary, everybody across all seven, if you wanted to get access to the rest of what was in your contract, you had to do that individually and you had to demand that.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

I demanded it and I got it and was able to hire who I needed for my team. But ultimately, there were people in my cohort who were not able to access their full startup resources because they weren't willing to, and totally understand why, especially in a vulnerable position, but a faculty member shouldn't be put in that position where they have to decide if they're going to demand their resources or not and the potential consequences of that.

Shimon Cohen:

Exactly.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So, yeah. Thank you for spotlighting that as another type of way this kind of stuff shows up. And it can be very innocuous at first until you realize what the heck is going on. I mean, one of the things that the dean told me was that we don't have this money. And so I'm like, "What? You hired me. Two things, one of two things, either you have the money and you're lying to me, which yes, that's a problem, or you hired me and you don't have this money. That's a problem." So in my first year I walked myself right on over to the university accountants, all CPAs, and sat in front of these three White CPAs and said, "What is going on? I need somebody to look at the accounts, wherever they are, and see if the money is there." And they told me, "Dr. Davis, yes, the money is there. Work with your dean and I'm sure you'll get access to what you need." And you talk about being blown away.

Shimon Cohen:

Also, it's like, what's the message? "Well, we don't have the money." What do you think I'm going to do? Just sit here and be like, "Oh, okay."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Right.

Shimon Cohen:

You're like, "What?"

Dr. Maxine Davis:

I'm going to take one for the team or something? I don't even know you all like that. I'm committed to environmental support, but you ain't about to do that to me on semester one, day one. Yeah, if we encounter some rough patches, I'm down to sacrifice. I don't even know you all like that. No, no, you pull that from wherever you need to pull it from to make it happen. But it was there all along, that's the thing.

Shimon Cohen:

Right.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

There were so many lies.

Shimon Cohen:

He was messing with you.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Oh, there were lies. He lied constantly, constantly.

Shimon Cohen:

So another thing you had shared with me at one point is one of the things that they took issue with in the tenure review was that you were involved with political engagement in the form of a protest, right, like on the campus? Can you talk about that too and what that issue was about?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Oh gosh, for annual reviews on the tenure track and in academia in general, there are guidelines for what you're supposed to be assessing and they should fall within the scope of what you've done and accomplished in terms of teaching, research, and service. And most universities have rejected the idea of adding a fourth category titled collegiality or something like that. And so people recognize the potential of evaluating someone's collegiality, the danger that could occur in that and it being a potential space that holds weight as much as your research, teaching and service, which is a bit more objective.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Well, it's not in the purview of the UT system to evaluate collegiality. However, this is what essentially occurred in my third-year review and these comments that had absolutely nothing to do with the criteria that were supposed to be evaluated ended up, by the associate deans, who the Black woman, Debra Woody, wrote these comments and then the other associate deans, two other women, voted in

favor of the position not to renew me, as did the dean, despite the faculty voting opposite and in support.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Anyhow, this is where the inappropriate comments in my mid tenure review occurred. At the associate dean level and conflating collegiality with the service, and essentially just their own personal evaluation of me and my activities that I did on my own time, and they put them in the service category. And one of the things Dr. Woody said, I wish I had it in front of me to read it verbatim, but it was something akin to people have a fear of me in the department or something like this. And also, I'm in protests where I'm holding a sign that says UTA hates Black mothers. And first of all, my sign that I was holding said something like Doctors for Brianna and Journi, a student who was being outspoken about her experiences as a Black student at UTA. The person I was standing next to, their sign did say UTA hates Black mothers, but somehow that was cast upon me as something that I should have had control over. I'm not really certain what the context is.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

There's no way that should have ended up in my evaluation. And this was a protest, Black Lives Matter esque protest, that a piece was done in the Dallas Morning News. However, given my experiences up to that moment, I had no problem actually standing next to that person because given the university's treatment of me thus far, and I'm a mother, I had no leg to stand on. I had no body of evidence to object to what she was saying in all honesty. I did not object. And it doesn't matter. It should not have mattered if I did or didn't. Again, my sign that I was holding said, Doctors for Journi and Brianna, this mother and daughter duo. And yet, somehow these type of things were put into my evaluation. And my engagement in public protests is political engagement. Explicitly, the UT system says that's not supposed to be something that you evaluate people on, for a good reason, as you can imagine where that could go, as it did.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. And in social work-

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And in social work.

Shimon Cohen:

That's supposed to be part of actually our ethics to do that, to do it.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Exactly. That's supposed to be in favor of useful service to community, if anything, but that was not how it was used or framed. And again, in context of many other problematic statements that were made in that block quote of the review. But that was an example of one thing that stood out and also these lies that were put in the review, I ultimately asked the provost and president, even an administration higher up, this needs to be removed from my file. And that is not an unusual request when things like this happen. I later talked with someone, Black faculty in the UT system, who had something similar occur where something wrong and inappropriate was put into her review by her superior. They went to the provost and it was removed. That did not happen in my case. And in fact, I never heard a response-

Shimon Cohen:

Wow.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

...to my request, and this is while I was on faculty there. I provided many opportunities and have yet to date had that request granted, despite how egregious things are actually in print. It's not a subjective matter, at least the appropriateness of these being allowed to stay in my file. So yeah, I tried to have that removed and it wasn't.

Shimon Cohen:

I also know that you've shared with me that you filed a complaint with the Council on Social Work Education. Just so people listening know, that's the nationally accrediting organization that accredits schools of social work to be accredited. And that's why if you get a degree from that program, it's valid and you can eventually get licensed and all that, right? This is the accrediting body that has certain standards and policies that all these accredited programs are supposed to adhere to. So you file the complaint with them, what was the response to that? I guess, what was the complaint and what was the response to the complaint?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

First, I think that it is problematic that CSWE is the only place to file something like this in terms of holding the profession accountable. And the requirements for filing a complaint like that require you to outline what particular violations occurred according to failures to meet the commitment of providing sound education. I provided the argument that the things that I described and what I pointed to did in fact present a case for not meeting and were worthy of investigation and sanction to... For the School of Social Work to align themselves in ways that would prevent this from happening to other people.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

I think there's a lot of unknown that happens behind the scenes and in bodies like this. And sometimes it can be as simple as how you frame something that might need to be presented in a different way or it might need more evidence or whatnot. But the requirements there... One of which that I think is really troublesome is that the person filing the complaint, even if they're... While they're still on faculty or they're no longer there or they're a student or whatever their role is. You have to send the complaint and its entirety to the dean of the school. Well, when the dean of the school is the person responsible for perpetrating these things, it puts me in a very awkward position and it doesn't provide the safety that you would want to have with something like that.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And so when I submitted the report, I... Although I was no longer on faculty, I was still in the very early process of healing. And I could not communicate with him. I could not simply put his name on an email. I couldn't do it. I could not do it. But I needed to submit the complaint. I did it anyhow. And I submitted the complaints with the president's name. At the time the interim president was Dr. Lim. I sent it to Dr. Lim instead of Dean Ryan. And ultimately it was not accepted by CSWE because one of the... One of the things was that it was not sent to Dean Ryan.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So that's a fault not on... I think not on the staff, but on a procedural error. Not procedural error. But... But the policy around that needs to change in order for people to make complaints. And for their own safety not be subjected to interactions with the person who may be perpetrating violence against them or being inappropriate with them. And so that was one of two reasons. I can't remember the other one that... I believe there were two, but that was the main one that disqualified my submission from continuing further.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So I have... And since now in a place where obviously... Oh, maybe not obviously. But I have healed to a degree that I could submit that complaint again and put his email on there and be perfectly fine with it. But I have not done that. And I've planned to. But I haven't committed to doing that again because I don't know if it's worth it for what I have to give emotionally to be able to do it. But I could do it now. I could resubmit it if I wanted to. And that... Would feel that the staff could do everything that was in their power.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. I think one of the... And I've given this feedback in a meeting and in writing to administration in CSWE. That this complaint process is highly problematic.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

It puts the burden on the person or persons who have already been harmed-

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Right.

Shimon Cohen:

...to relive it, to document, to... It assumes that this... The dean it's going to go to or the program chair or whatever is going to handle it well and...

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And it's altruistic.

Shimon Cohen:

Right. I also think of... If a student is having an issue in a program and they file it, now they're a total target. Which they probably already have been somewhat, but... Because they've maybe been vocal. But even if it's someone who's just been observing things and isn't vocal. Now they're known and... There's just... One of the biggest issues with all of this is that there's... Where do you go for accountability? Where do you go-

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

...when at every level... And this is that whole part of when people talk about systems being broken and then it's like, "No, they were actually designed to be this way."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yep.

Shimon Cohen:

Right?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah, mission accomplished. Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. Because you go to your... First, you're just trying to bring stuff up in a... In a meeting or you go through a process that you need to go through. And at every level you're getting problems or... There's problems. And there's just no one else to go... There's no other level you can go to. You've gone to the provost. You've gone to the president. You've tried with your dean, but it's coming from the dean. It's coming from other administrators. It's coming from colleagues. And you go to the accrediting body and it's... And they'll... And they'll all have... And the accrediting body. "Well, you didn't... You didn't follow our procedure." Well, your procedure's a problem.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

You know?

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. It's a procedure...

Shimon Cohen:

But yet on paper it's anti-racism this and anti-racism that. It's like...

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah.

Shimon Cohen:

Okay. Okay.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

This is... This is a great point to bring our conversation to a close in a way that provides some hope, which is always important for me. Because to leave hopeless is... It might be real. It might be real, but if there's something I can do beyond this I think it's important to highlight. And so I want to talk about this exact point of creating places that actually hold people accountable, and my efforts to do that, and what will be coming in the future.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

I went... I went to the highest. Eventually went to AAUP recently for them to open an investigation. And unfortunately, because it was a year after I left. It took me a year just to heal. You've got to provide space for people to recount all of this and gather all and go back through all the emails and text messages and capture all this stuff. That is a very painful process. Anyhow, I wasn't eligible despite the AAUP administration being very supportive and very sympathetic to what had occurred because I was past the cutoff point of how long you have to file when something like this happens. There was nothing they could do to investigate. But they are available and have for many faculty across institutions been the only place of recourse in relationship to retaliation in tenure and all kind of things.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Erlene on Twitter describes her experience and that's recounted in AAUP report. And I think one of her tagline is refired. She didn't just retire. Which is very much true in terms of a common tactic, especially when it comes to ageism. People force people into retirement when in actuality, no. They did not choose to retire. You fired them and you just want to make it look like they retired. So shout out to her for doing that in social work and naming refired as what she experienced. AAUP did expose that.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So going forward, I think AAUP really needs to think about the parameters in which someone can file and potentially adjust those to account for all of the process that happens as a human and what it takes to file. But they don't currently. And I've asked my mentors who are presidents and board directors. And I have... I have a team of people who love and support me across the nation, so that is beautiful. This brought people out of the woodwork to let me know that I'm not alone. And so now I have personal... Text relationships with university presidents and... And just a wealth of resources to draw upon.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Anyhow. I recently asked one of these new mentors I acquired who... The person across all type of academia. Is there anything else beyond the AAUP to hold institutions and departments accountable? And he said, "Unfortunately not." For me, it... That response was a relief in that I did... I literally did everything I could. There wasn't something I missed. The same is... Same type of thing with EEOC. They have a limit on what you can claim. And I decided that I did not want to sue because it would be too much of a burden on my family. And my family has went through enough. And the exchange was that I talk about it as much as I want. And ain't nobody trying to... Don't... Look. Don't come. Don't even try to come with no settlement. No nothing. You cannot shut me up. I... The gift in exchange for not suing is that I tell at all. There's no nondisclosure agreement. All those things that could come with that.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Anyhow. So going forward... That... We need to think about broader mechanisms to hold institutions accountable and provide some ways to... For... For particularly Black folks who in many cases are the

most vulnerable. This is the identity you can't hide, usually. And it just... In 2022 this is not where we should be.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Anyway. So what I'm doing going forward is I'll be forming a resource that is an academic Green Book. And I'm sure you know about the Green Book that allowed Black people to travel safely across the U.S. decades before. This is... This is what we need at this point in time. Hopefully we get to a place where we don't need that. But I'll be creating, in partnership with others, a place where people can go to and say this is a verified, generally safe space for you to be on the tenure track. There... Generally speaking. A verified, safe place for you to be on faculty in other capacities. And intend to build that up to scale. First, it'll be in social work, of course, and build that up for the discipline of social work.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And as a counterpoint... That is what gets the most energy. As a counterpoint, of course, you have to have a academic Red Book to say, "Halt. Do not. I don't care. Whatever you do, you do not go here. You do not go here because it could cost you your life. This is not... It could cost you everything. Your... Your wellbeing. Your... Yourself. Your mental health. It could really cost you. Do not go here." And for as long as it's moder... Monitored by the procedures I'll put in place with that. Again, in... Not in isolation, but in collaboration. That'll be something we release every year and is a starting place for at least people to know formally where to stay away from. Because once I talked to people... I just wasn't connected to the right people to know. People have known about UTA for a long time. Especially Black folks.

Shimon Cohen:

Same with where I was at.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

I just...

Shimon Cohen:

Because as soon as I started connecting with people, they were like, "Oh, yeah. We already know about that."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yeah. I just didn't know.

Shimon Cohen:

Yep.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And... Yeah. I want to formalize that. Yes, relationships and stuff is critical. Talk to people who... Who might know insights. Yes, I encourage all of that. But I'm committed to write. Putting this down on... Accessible resources where people can go and say, "Who's on the list? Who's not on the list?" And it... And the criteria to be on the list is very high. And it's possible to not be on the Green Book and not be on the Red Book. That just means you haven't done something super egregious, but you really ain't

committed like you need to protect Black people. And I think most universities will fall within that middle category.

Shimon Cohen:

I think it's amazing that you're going to do that. I'm excited to see it. Definitely share about it, of course, when it comes out. And I... For me, I think the most hopeful thing about your story is where you're at now.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yes.

Shimon Cohen:

That you're happy and that you feel like you can be you and it's... You're supported in who you are.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yes. Absolutely. Shout out to Dr. Ryon Cobb. I was ready to leave academia. I was ready to resign and just say, "If I don't continue on here; academia doesn't get me." He is hands down the person who said, "Maxine, please. Please just apply to one or two other places. Everywhere is not as bad as this. It's bad, but this is extreme. Just try one more place."

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And I submitted five applications, got four interviews and three offers. So the story there is stay on top of your academic research game for tenure track folks. You play to the outside market. Don't listen to what they say will get you tenure in your institution where you are. You play to the grand market and be ready. Have your stuff on point where you can leave. And your CV says that I can leave at any time. Trust and believe. And that is one thing that people can do in order to protect themselves a little bit from just being wiped out of academia altogether.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

There's problems with that, too. But... That ultimately I was focused on my research and I had the publications and the submitted and awarded grants too... Hey, I'm valuable. And yes, Rutgers came correct. Shout out to Rutgers because they came correct and recognized my value in many ways. And it's great to be on faculty at a place where I not only feel safe, but feel accepted and valued. Truly valued.

Shimon Cohen:

That's... That's amazing. I'm really happy for you. I'm so happy. When I found out about that. And when you told me about it, I was just so happy. And the more... And the longer you've been there, it's like... Because at first it's like, "Okay, this is happening. She's happy, but it... What's going to happen? Is it going to... Is it going to stay good?" Because... And it... And it... And from everything you've said it has, and so that's... That's incredible. I'm... I'm so glad. And...

Dr. Maxine Davis:

No, I was not... I had no qualms about... If things weren't how... I talked to many more people this time around and got perspective all across the nation on, "Okay. Is this a safe place for me to go? Safe enough?"

Shimon Cohen:

Right.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And from what I got... From what I got back overall, I was like, "Okay, we can do this." And hands down the Union. And Rutgers having a strong dynamic Union is what pulled me there over the other offers that I had. So that. Structural things like unions is the way forward there. It should... Every faculty deserves to have that if they're going to be a dynamic educator and in the space of academia. It's a valuable resource that is it just priceless. So that is a big part of why Rutgers got me, but certainly they came correct with the offer and they won me over in many regards. So that has been beautiful.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

And by this point I was vocal on Twitter. So everybody who brought me in for interviews. At this point, everybody saw me on social media and they knew the... What I was willing to say. And so you kind of know your risk there. So if they brought me in for the interview, I just was myself. I was my total self and it... I didn't want to be anywhere that didn't accept all of me.

Shimon Cohen:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So there was... I went into the market very free because I wasn't trying to hide. I didn't need to hide anything or be performative. I showed up as myself. And of course that's what you want. You want where you... Wherever you go for you to be able to be your full self.

Shimon Cohen:

Well, like I said, I'm really happy for you. I'm happy for Rutgers too. And...

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Oh, yes.

Shimon Cohen:

Yeah. Because they got a good one. So I just want to, again, thank you for taking the time to talk with me to share with the listener, share with folks who follow the podcast, who read the transcript, and share your story. And I hope that people realize that they're not alone when they're going...

Shimon Cohen:

First of all, I wish no one would have to go through any of this.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Right.

Shimon Cohen:

No one should. But for folks who might be in their... Feeling that initial confusion. That maybe some of the initial warning signs and stuff is... To really pay attention to that. And document everything, even things you think you don't need to. Later... You do.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Yes.

Shimon Cohen:

And to know that there are others who have gone through it and you're very... I know you're very responsive. You're very available. Now you're going to create this project. So I just... I want to thank you so much for doing everything you're doing and for sharing your story and for doing the work.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

Thank you. Yes, I'm doing the work. And I'm only able to do the work because I stayed true to... Let me pan you over to these... These inspirational folks. This is Bertha Gilkey Bonds who... Phenomenal. She's... She's Aunt Bertha to me. She passed away before I graduated my doctoral program, but... She organized all of Chicago and St. Louis on public housing efforts and giving res... Giving residents the responsibility to manage their own communities. And I learned. I learned from the best. I learned from Aunt Bertha and from my mom, Maxine Johnson, who is a premier community activist and is... Most famously worked on fighting against eminent domain abuse in Black communities.

Dr. Maxine Davis:

So at every point, that's my guidepost. Would Aunt Bertha be happy? Would my mama approve of this? And honestly that has given me the, "Okay, yes, proceed" or "Halt. Don't do it." You can't be silent. You have to say something. Aunt Bertha and my mama would not have me not say something. So that is the guidepost that I use in terms of whether I do something or not in social work. Thank you so very much. I appreciate you.

Shimon Cohen:

Thank you for listening to Doin' The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change. I hope you enjoyed the podcast. Please follow on Twitter and leave positive reviews on iTunes. If you're interested in being a guest or know someone who's doing great work, please get in touch. Thank you for doing real work to make this world a better place.