

Episode 27: Dr. Lisa Cook and Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman | Transcript

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JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: Welcome to Hidden Truths, the podcast where we examine the root causes of economic and racial inequality. I'm Jhumpa Bhattacharya and I'm thrilled to be joined by our guests, Dr. Lisa Cook and Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman.

Dr. Lisa Cook is an Associate Professor in the Department of Economics and International Relations at Michigan State University. She earned a PhD in Economics from the University of California Berkeley and has held positions or conducted post-doctoral research at the National Bureau of Economic Research, the Federal Reserve Banks of New York and Philadelphia, the World Bank, and the Brookings Institution, among others.

Anna is a research scholar in Economics at Harvard University, as well as a visiting research fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research and a predoctoral trainee at the inaugural NYU Schmidt Futures program. Anna is also the cofounder and CEO of the Sadie Collective, an organization that seeks to advance the representation of Black women in quantitative fields such as economics, data science, and public policy.

Lisa and Anna, thank you so much for joining us on our podcast today. You both recently co-authored a powerful op-ed in the New York Times highlighting the severe underrepresentation of Black women in the field of economics and why that matters for our collective well-being. I want to start our conversation by asking, why did you decide to write this? Why does it matter that Black women are not represented as well in this field?

DR. LISA COOK: Why don't you start, Anna?

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Sure. So if you don't have people in a room, right, the ideas that circulate won't be representative of the people who are, you know, outside of the room in the sense that, like, for Black women not being a part of the economics profession in a significant way, the communities that Black women are a part of are, you know, tangibly affected by the decisions that are made by people who don't look like them. Oftentimes those decisions don't reflect the needs and concerns of the communities that Black women are a part of. And Janet Yellen is quoted saying that the financial crisis of

2008 probably would have been prevented or mitigated even faster had there been, you know, more voices in the room, had not the room been so homogeneous.

So for us writing this op-ed was about first naming the problem, right? Because I think that people don't want to admit that the underrepresentation of Black women in the economics profession is abysmal. And so we wanted to name that with the data that Dr. Cook so graciously analyzed and collected as well.

But the other thing that we wanted to talk about were the solutions or some of the solutions, rather, to sort of the underrepresentation of Black women. There is actually a Tweet that Dr. Cook Tweeted out a couple months ago where she talked about how for Black women, you know, you have to cite us, you have to mentor us, you have to teach us, you have to amplify us. It's not enough just to reTweet some diversity Tweet about, you know, we should be supporting Black women, but it's about using the power that you have to tangibly affect our career trajectories and in part also the lives of the people that we end up impacting through our careers.

JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: I love that. And I think that there's something that you said that I want to expand on a little bit when you said "Black women in the communities that we're a part of" because I often think that people think that Black people in particular are just a monolith, right? But you're not, obviously [Laughs]. And Black women, you know, you could be -- I can see that people would be, like, "Well, that's a community."

So can either of you speak more to, like, yes, this idea that Black women also are not a monolith, and there are actually multiple communities that you all belong to?

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Dr. Cook, that's all you [Laughs].

DR. LISA COOK: So [Laughs] well, you know, I'll start with one if we're picking up where the Janet Yellen quote left off. Just like other women, we are the primary purchasers in the economy. And if we are, there's a lot of financial information that we have and that we use, and we might do things a little bit differently. We might pay bills a little bit differently, and that is worth knowing if we are -- if there's a calculation being done about the data that matter in, you know, in and out of a crisis, not necessarily just in crisis time.

So we are members of many different communities -- the community of women, the community of African-Americans. We wind up supporting many households,

multigenerational households. So we know a lot about interacting with the economy in very different ways. So I think that's one fundamental way, but I think that we have a lot of information that's being overlooked and underused.

And if I can pick up on something else that Anna was saying with respect to representation, as a professor, I am always the only Black woman. In this case, at Michigan State I'm the only Black person in the economics department and I often am visited by students of all races, many students of color, who see me as the only example of making it as an economist, of making this a real possibility. And I think that's unfortunate.

I never volunteered, never signed up to be in that position. But they want to feel -- students want to feel as though they're being heard, that examples are not just the negative examples that are in economics courses, negative examples are of women making mistakes in economics or somebody's grandmother. But, you know, positive examples being used with respect to women, Black women, and underrepresented minorities.

Or if there are films, for example, that are produced by -- films, comic books, any materials -- produced by the Federal Reserve system, I'd like to see Black women not just as the recipient of information from the central bank, but advising the heads of the Federal Reserve Banks or the FOMC.

It seems intuitive to gather as much information as we can, and I think -- with respect to underrepresentation -- I think there's an emergency. I wrote a Tweet thread about this. The share of Black women or the percent of Black women majoring in economics rose by 1% between 2006 and 2016, and for Black men it was 44%, the increase was 44%. There is something happening that is deterring Black women from pursuing economics.

Now, this looks like women to a certain extent, women overall, but it's not so stark. This is extremely stark. For 2% to 3% of all economists who have PhDs in economics to be of African descent is just a paltry number, but for 0.6% of those earning PhDs to be Black women is very small, which means that we're missing -- and our being missing is a statement in itself when we're a much larger part of the population.

And the information we gather, because we work in so many different sectors -- and this fuels the economy -- this is the highly marginal propensity to consume, especially let's say the high marginal propensity to consume a sector of the economy. And this would be sort of middle class, working class people, this would be an important voice to have in the room at all times and not just as the recipient of economic information, but one who could help with making decisions about the economy.

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Right, so Dr. Cook and I met [Laughs] was pretty much Dr. Cook came and gave a talk at American University and I had never met a Black female economics professor until I met Dr. Cook. So I remember I heard her research on patents, African-American patents, and it's one of her most well-known works. And after she spoke, I think I spoke to you on the spot, and I was like, "Can you be my mentor?" And she was like, "Yes. [Laughs] Also apply for the AU summer program." [Laughs] Always plugging that. And so, you know, what she's saying is really true, right? I'm a student, and it is really problematic that even when you read your textbooks, like textbooks in economics, for example, Black people aren't in the textbook.

So, like, not even white women are acknowledged in the textbook because I think that's something that Betsy Stevenson did some research on using textual analysis. There's just -- it seems like economic textbooks, which are talking about the world supposedly, don't actually represent the world. And so if you don't see yourself in the text and you don't see yourself in the classroom, then where do you see yourself? And so the question of, you know, why aren't Black women going, even majoring in economics, right?

Because the research that Dr. Cook just cited was Dr. Wanda V. Sharpe's research. The question is, you know, it's not that we're not interested in this, right? And that's what somebody will tell us, like, "Oh, you guys aren't interested in this," or "You guys can't handle the math," but it's the fact that literally there are barriers in the system that are preventing us from really seeing ourselves in the space, and even thriving in the space.

JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: No, I think that's a really important point. Because this is not about people's decisions, this is not about individual choices, right? This is about personal responsibility, right? Like, we love that narrative in America, right? It's your fault you're poor, you made some bad decisions, if only you knew how to save better, if only you studied harder, right? Like you would be getting that PhD in economics like everybody else.

And I think one of the things your op-ed did so well was actually talk about what it's like to be a Black woman in the field of economics, which is mainly, you know, populated by white men, right, quite frankly. So can you get into that a little bit? Because it's not just about, like, what you were saying, Anna. It's not like you don't want to, but there's actual barriers. So, like, what is it like as two Black women in this sea of mostly white men?

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: So I'm earlier on in the pipeline, right? So Dr. Cook can speak sort of the full experience because she has gotten her PhD, and she's had a very

illustrious and impressive career. But I'm just getting started, and I can kind of talk about what it's been like so far.

My first experience in economics began at the annual economics meetings/conference, it's called ASSA -- I actually don't know what it stands for. But underneath that umbrella is mainly the American Economic Association meetings, and there's a variety of different conferences that are under that. I went to this conference in 2017 shortly after I changed my major to math and then had spoken to some folks about economics. And pretty much what ended up happening was I wanted to go to, like, a Nobel laureate lunch. I thought it was cool, so I was like, "Let me go and see how it's like."

And I got there, and I sat down, and I looked at the room. And I was like, "Huh, everybody here is white and male. Like, what is this?" And so then the high table came in, and I noticed that everybody was white and male, except for, like, two white women and a dash of brown. And I think the person was Indian, or just from the southeast Asian region of the world. And I was like, "Where are the Black people [Laughs]? You know, where are the Latinx folks?" I was just really confused.

And I left that lunch kind of questioning whether or not I was supposed to be here and if anyone had sort of considered this like, just the lack of color in the room was really confusing to me. And it contrasted all of the other sessions that I went to where there were Africans or, you know, Black Americans, or -- you know what I'm saying? Like, it was a lot more diverse, I could see myself in the room.

That same year a lot of the committees focused on, like, underrepresented groups. So, like, minorities and women were talking about the intersection of the two, which is really important. So they were talking about mentoring underrepresented minority women in the joint session between the committee on the status of women, the committee on the status of minorities, and they were also talking about in the National Economic Association -- which is, like, the body of Black economists for the profession, that, you know, the pipeline which we kind of addressed here with Dr. Sharpe's research -- she was actually the one that give the address that year -- was really bad for Black women. And at this time I was there with my co-founder Fanta, and we're sitting in the audience like, "Whoa, like, how bad is it?"

And so interestingly enough, when I was thinking about going into economics, I actually went to go speak to somebody. They'll remain -- who will remain, excuse me, nameless and that person told me on several occasions that he did not think I could get a PhD in economics. And for those who don't know, he was definitely white [Laughs] and he was somebody who had the power to empower me, but instead undermined me by saying, you

know -- there was one instance where he was talking in front of other classmates, and he was telling me, like, "Do you understand the mathematical rigor that goes into a PhD in economics?" or something adjacent to that. And it's -- it was funny to me because I was like, "I'm a whole math major." Like, of course I understand the math that it takes to do this because that's why I'm doing it. But the fact that he had made assumptions about my ability before even meeting me -- I think when I started talking to Dr. Cook more regularly and this was after we met, I believe, after the American University talk, and then we just started talking more after The Sadie Collective was created -- was that this is just a sliver of my experience and this has been experienced widely by, I mean, you could name it, all minority groups obviously in the profession, but Black women in particular, face this literally at every level of their career.

I actually Tweeted about this and it went somewhat viral [Laughs] in the Twitterspace. People were saying, like, "Oh, he's just a bad guy." You know, that's the economic -- bad actor, just an isolated incident -- and what I was noticing was that amongst all those response, there were Black women saying, "Actually, this is the norm and you need to, you know, get a community of people who can sort of hedge against that because you're going to be facing that as you move up in the profession." And for me in particular where I have a little bit of visibility as, like, a pre-doctoral student, they're saying, you know, people are really going to try to undermine you because of sort of where you are and how quickly you're kind of moving through the profession.

So that is something that I've experienced so far, and I expect to experience more pushback as I'm going through the profession. But I think Dr. Cook, as I mentioned before, can give you a fuller picture of what it means to be a Black woman in economics.

DR. LISA COOK: So just to piggyback on that, I experienced the same thing 20 years or 30 years prior, that I was visiting schools, just talking about my interest in economics and without them even asking about my background -- you know, didn't ask about whether I was a Marshall Scholar or whether I had a degree from Oxford, whether, you know, I had done anything else -- they started asking me about my math skills.

And typically it was interesting, it wasn't the professors. The professors seemed quite open to this notion of a Black woman coming into their PhD programs. I didn't see any when I was visiting the top programs at that time, but there was a Black woman who was a post-doc, and yes, there was a Black woman enrolled at one of the top five programs -- and she transferred the year after I had that conversation -- but it was the graduate students who were giving me on-the-spot math tests just, you know, at a gathering and twice at

dinner parties where graduate students were gathered and who were supposed to be hosting me.

They, you know, some guy came up to me, some white guy came up to me and started quizzing me on mathematics, and it happened twice. And it was just striking. It was, like, the automatic response to Black women is you belong someplace else, and you definitely don't have the math to be able to do this. And, you know, when I answered their questions correctly, it was only, you know, a day or two later or possibly even when I got home that I had realized what was going on -- that I was being given a live math test.

Like, why are you even here? You shouldn't even be talking to us if you don't know how to take a third derivative, for example. So I wrote about this in the AEA CSWEP Newsletter. And I keep telling young folks like Anna and people who would like to pursue economics who are Black women, my sisters at Spellman, you have to block out the noise. And this is something that I learned from desegregating schools in Georgia, you absolutely have to block out the noise because people will put on you their low expectations.

I think that this is something that is, you know, commonly known as a soft bigotry of low expectations, and I see it especially pervasive for Black women. And Dania Francis' research shows that Black women are, given all other factors, under-recommended for AP Calculus, which we know is the gateway to doing, first of all, to doing a college degree, but secondly, certainly with respect to doing an undergraduate degree in economics or in math and a STEM field. So if that is happening, this is starting really early and I suspect this is where that number, an increase of 1% versus an increase of 44%, is happening. Because Black women are being deterred early on.

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Yeah, and just to add onto that point really quickly, Dr. Francis' work, she actually found that Black girls in the seventh grade are perceived as disruptive typically by their teachers, and therefore they're not recommended for certain courses or whatever, and then the AP stuff is actually additional work that Dr. Cook is citing that Dr. Francis also put out. And I can say this as someone who was also very, like, considered as disruptive in the classroom to the point where, you know, everything that Dr. Cook just said, I've lived. It's not like this is just some arbitrary study, this is a very real experience.

You know, there were people who thought I could never do math. There were people who looked at me and they said, "She's too disruptive, she's too loud. Maybe she should go do something in the humanities," whatever. Not saying that the humanities is a bad thing, right? But this sort of mystification -- I don't think that's a word, but [Laughs] let's just say

it's a word for now -- this mystification or mystifying math for a particular group because they look the way they look, is ridiculous.

And it's weird, too, because, I'll be talking to some of my friends, and they'll say, "What did you major in?" And I say I majored in math. "Really? Wow. Man, I could never do that." That is really the response you get from people who look like me and look like Dr. Cook, as if math is for a select group of people in the population and only they can do that, right?

So I think that, yeah, we have to really talk about how this is not some problem. I think a lot of people are, like, "Oh, you know, Black people are underrepresented in economics, and there should be a magic bullet solution that's going to fix it." No, you have to think about the problem holistically. Thinking about it holistically means you have to start from the very beginning, which is actually when you actually entered the educational pipeline, and how educators interact with Black girls from the jump. Yeah.

JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: Yeah, it's, like, very hard for me not to be shaking with anger as you all are talking about your experiences. Seriously. And one of the things that I find really striking is that, you know, despite the age difference, right -- so, Dr. Cook, you said this was happening to you 20 years ago, and this is still happening to Anna now. We're not seeing shifts, right? The same history is just repeating itself to the point where it's not history, it's present and will be the future if we don't, you know, name it and really do something about this.

And I think that there's something, you know, you all obviously are both Black women, and you are talking about this from the perspective of Black women and bringing an intersectional analysis to this, which I think is really important. I think we should dive into that more.

Like, what would you say to folks that say, "Well, this is really more about racism, like, Black men aren't all that well represented in economics, either." So is it racism, is it racism and sexism? I mean, I think I know the answer is that it's both but I kind of want to speak to that a little bit [Laughs], like, what is the difference? Like, why call out the Black female experience as opposed to just the Black experience?

DR. LISA COOK: Well, I think I'll start there. Basically, we're looking at the data on economics undergraduates. You know, again, this 44% increase versus a 1% increase suggests that it's not race; these are both Black women and Black men between 2006 and 2015. There is something that is happening to Black women that is deterring them much

more than disproportionately to study economics -- deterring them from studying economics.

So I think that it is racism, and sexism, and possibly stereotypes. It might be segregation. So if we're living in an increasingly segregated society -- and we are -- the baseline of segregation is already high but it is also increasing, that means that you might not encounter people who look different from you. And you probably aren't encountering that many Black women if, for example, they are being deterred from studying higher-level math classes. I would say that this isn't -- you know, we can talk about this being 20 or 30 years ago for me and being, you know, now and present for Anna, but this is happening to my aunt, 60 years ago, 70 years ago.

She's a professor of mathematics at Virginia State University, was the chair for a long time, and she receives that kind of treatment. She was often in all-Black settings so I would say that this was a common view that women shouldn't be taking higher-level math courses. And she passed with flying colors her courses at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign when it was one of the top, and it probably still is, one of the top math departments in the country. So that myth was debunked.

And I think that's why I never thought about this not being a possibility, that something that was math-intensive never seems like it was out of reach because all of the women in my family, at least on my mom's side, were math and science folks. They never said, "This isn't something you could do." It's just when we interacted with the school system or when we went beyond college that this became an issue.

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Yeah, so to answer your question and sort of echo what Dr. Cook is saying, I think to understand the experience of Black women in economics, you must look at the first Black woman who has done a PhD in Economics, who also was the first Black person to get a PhD in Economics, and it's Sadie T.M. Alexander, Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander. She got her PhD in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania in 1921. She was also the first president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated -- just want to make sure I got that correctly.

DR. LISA COOK: Good.

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Thank you [Laughs], Dr. Cook is a Delta [Laughs]

So that being said, one thing that I heard when we were at the first conference -- the first Sadie T.M. Alexander Conference for Economics and Related Fields, that the Sadie Collective organized -- from her daughter, Ray Alexander-Minter-- Dr. Ray Alexander-Minter was that she never saw her mom as an economist. In fact, her mom didn't, her mom talked about economics through her speeches, as Dr. Nina Banks has shown through her work, but her family did not -- from my understanding -- see her as an economist. And so the question is why, right?

Well, it turns out that if you look at the history, racism and sexism kept Dr. Alexander out from sort of, the networks that would be needed, as well as some of the professional development and the professional trajectory that would have been required to become an economist. So a lot of people sometimes want to say, "Okay, it's just a racism problem," right, because we're Black. But not necessarily. I would make an argument -- and Dr. Cook can either correct me or back me up on this -- that some Black men have tried to erase the fact that Dr. Sadie T.M. Alexander was the first Black person to get a PhD in Economics, right?

And I mean, let's call a spade a spade right now, right? There are people who don't want to explicitly state the problems that Black women have and try to absorb it into some larger issue, but this is a fairly, like, intersectional problem here. Because on one hand, Black men are doing -- the Black men who are in the profession are doing fairly well. And, you know, according to the survey that we cite that Dr. Cook worked on, Black women specifically have to go through the most measures along with Latinx women to avoid discrimination, and harassment, and stuff like that. Not to say that Black men don't face those things, but we face it a slightly different level.

And so the sexism piece -- the sexism piece comes into play as well. Because Sadie T.M. Alexander was in class with white women, and those white women kept her out. And we don't want to say that because we want to say, "Rah, rah feminism. We're all in this together," um, sure. But let's really state the facts here. My experience as a Black woman is going to be fundamentally different than your experience as a white woman. And sometimes what ends up happening is that white women will use their whiteness to get to where they need to go. We don't want to say that, though, because it's easier to just talk about one problem.

So one issue that, you know, Dr. Cook and I's op-ed is responding to as well is that you had this profession-wide media fueled conversation about sexism in economics, right? But then when you looked at the articles, all of the women they featured, except one, Dr. Cook

[Laughs] were white or white-passing. And so your issues, sure, are definitely difficult obviously.

Like, sexism is -- it affects you, duh. But what about me where I have to deal with race, ethnicity at times, right, and being a woman? And I think that's, like, really sort of the fundamental argument we're making here, it's a two-front battle for us. Then that's excluding any other identifiers that you choose to, you know, associate yourself with. So if I were queer, for example, this would be an uphill mountain, okay?

And so I think we need to talk about how, like -- one thing that baffles me in just the professional space, especially the academic space, is that people can't wrap their head around people not being in buckets, right? Like, in the sense that people assume, like, "Oh, you're Black. Oh, you're a woman. Oh, you're this." And, like, there's no fluidity happening between those different categories, so to speak. And so then --

DR. LISA COOK: Or nuance --

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Thank you, or nuance!

I remember when this op-ed came out and people were, like, shocked, legitimately shocked that Black women had a really hard time -- that's an understatement of the century -- had, like, the most difficult time like, "Oh my God, you guys are facing all of this?" And it's like, "We did told y'all. This is not new information."

DR. LISA COOK: Right, right. To the climate study, a number of people said once that climate study came out that we didn't necessarily need the climate study to tell us that we were sort of oppressed in the field. But I think what it showed was -- first, I don't believe that because I think that economists don't believe it unless there's a number attached to it. So I don't agree with that. But I think that what it does show is that we're not just oppressed like other women, we're not just oppressed like other Black people. But we are the most with respect to these discriminatory activities, including reporting being discriminated against the most for promotion and pay or having to take steps.

We've had to take more steps than anybody else, just counting the steps. So not even asking, you know, about discrimination itself but taking more steps to avoid these things

than any other group. So I think that the evidence is clear and compelling in this regard. And I think that our pulling out the data and then pulling out the quotes --

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Yeah.

DR. LISA COOK: -- the quotes that appeared in the climate study, I think that while economists would like to say that they're more convinced by quantitative evidence, I would say without the quotes from the open-ended questions, they wouldn't have paid as much attention. In many cases they just don't know or they don't have to think about it, so they don't.

So the fact that Black women -- you know, we pulled out a quote about a Black woman who is a professor. And she was saying that she knows that she's a good teacher, and she gets much lower scores than her white and female counterparts and that this, you know, puts her in a special bucket, and this needs to change. This is one of the things that we were proposing in the op-ed piece, that this be one of the first things that's looked at with respect to climate.

Because I think that there's a large and -- oh, I know there's a large and growing literature that addresses the racial and gender bias in student evaluations and they're used everywhere and all the time, and they determine the outcome of many people's futures. I mean, the research -- one, universities are in the minority across the country. Most of the work that's being done at universities involves teaching. So this is a real barrier to entry into and sustainability in the profession if these student evaluations continue to contain these biases.

JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: Yeah, I think what's really fascinating to me is that both things can exist, right? Like, yes, it's hard for any Black person, like, racism does exist, and it's harder for Black women, and that doesn't take away from your experience as a Black man. It doesn't mean that we're not acknowledging there's something happening to you, but let's expand our minds and, right, like, it's happening at a different level.

And I think part of this is, like, this scarcity mentality or, like, everyone needs a piece of the pie, like, you can't acknowledge more than your own experience because then it's like, oh, you're not giving credence to something. I don't actually understand it, to be quite honest with you, but that's just kind of my theory, is that it's about wanting to be seen, right?

Again, this is a response to white supremacy because most of us are not seen. People of color are not seen, and so then let's just fight amongst each other.

But it's, like, yes, both things can be true. It can be hard for a Black man, and it can be harder for Black women and that shouldn't be that difficult to wrap your heads around, but I don't know, for some reason it seems to be for a lot of people.

I want to talk a little bit about how the op-ed has been received, both kind of in the general public -- You started talking about this a little bit, people saying like, "Wow, I had no idea, right?" I call that, like, the hidden figures problem. Like, I thought that was in the past, I thought, you know, [Laughs] that happened then, I thought things are all good now. -- but and particularly within the economic field, too, I think there's -- I'm kind of fascinated to hear if the reactions were similar or different.

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Yeah, I'm a digital native so I have not read the comments because comment sections are cesspools [Laughs]. Like, I'm not going to -- some of my friends are, like, "Yeah, you know, this person said this." And I'm like, "Okay, thank you. I didn't ask for you to tell me about the negative comments that I was getting." And people -- I mean, apparently people did have, you know, their whatever racist, sexist views about what we had written. I mean, the facts are plain, so I mean, you either agree with them or you don't.

That being said, I think in the economic space, at least on Twitter, it was received quite well and with this element of surprise, right, which I thought was interesting [Laughs]. I think what Dr. Cook said is absolutely correct. The quotes really allow the data to be crafted in a narrative that really talks about the experience of Black women, right?

The quote that says I would never recommend this field to my children. Like, if you have children, right, and you're reading this, you're like, "Whoa, what has gone on here that this person wouldn't even -- this Black mother wouldn't even recommend this to their child?" Um, yeah, we've gotten some pretty good reception. Some folks have been interested in talking with us about, you know, what this means for the profession. I think that's really important.

And, you know, some, like, very well-known economists, aside from Dr. Cook, of course, have also responded with, you know, they're really happy that the op-ed was written. My only qualm [Laughs] with the response is that it has stopped at just responses, right? No one has -- one of my friends, Adrian Davey who's actually a PhD student in Chemical Engineering at UC Berkeley, put a Tweet out recently saying, like, you know, when you guys

-- and he's talking about white folks in particular -- hear about we need more diversity or we're addressing this lack of representation problem in the academy, what do you guys do after that? And that's my question, right?

Some folks are like, "Well, I'm just going to donate to the Sadie Collective." You know, we'll take your money [Laughs], of course, because it helps this cause, right? But I think you have to -- that's a bandage for a deep, deep wound and it's not enough. And I think it's something that, you know, when you write a piece like this and people suddenly say, like, oh, there's a magic bullet solution to this problem, there's not. And I think for -- the first and foremost thing that you have to do is acknowledge the fact that the academy itself, like, by its inception was never created for Black women and more broadly Black people in mind. And that is why people have a fundamental sort of confusion that is associated with seeing Black people, and specifically Black women, in the space.

So a good example right now would be Dr. Cook. Dr. Cook is an exceptional researcher, exceptional scholar, and on top of that -- she's, like, I'm gassing her up [Laughs] -- on top of that, she is an excellent mentor. She's all of those things. And the thing is, the mentorship component, which arguably as the Director of the ADA Summer program, which is for minority students, is facilitating the pipeline for diversity into economics.

Would you believe me if I said the academy does not reward that? Like, they don't see value in that, clearly, right? Because you'll hear about people that do some more work, and they'll be penalized for that. Or it will quote unquote "affect their research productivity," and so then they might not be recommended for tenure, might not be recommended for a promotion.

And then note for me -- sorry, going off on a tangent -- I got kind of annoyed when people were applauding the Sadie Collective for existing, right? So the Sadie Collective is a group of young Black women. They're saying, "Oh my God, good for you guys. We love the work you're doing." And I'm glad you love the work we're doing, but I also want you to acknowledge the fact that we shouldn't be doing this work, right? It's like applauding somebody for driving on the road that they are fixing themselves when you had the power to create the road in the first place. It's an insult [Laughs], like it's really insulting. Yeah, go ahead.

DR. LISA COOK: And the young -- I mean, young folks shouldn't be the ones doing this. And this is a supply-side answer to a problem that has both a supply side and demand side. And we were saying in the -- and much more starkly in the earlier drafts of the op-ed piece --

that you have to address both. The demand side being the profession and the climate, and the supply side being what Anna and cofounders have done with the Sadie Collective.

And I think one of the things that I would like to say about the reaction is just how emotional it has been. I mean, I don't even think I told you about this, Anna, but I was in three different cities after the article came out besides my own. And people have been pulling me into rooms, thanking me for writing this. And it's been, you know, it's just been really emotional as -- and some said, you're giving voice to voices that have been ignored for so long that people were, you know, I wouldn't say this but this is how it might be perceived, that we're actively being silenced over the years. So I really feel that this is something, and I always felt that this is something beyond ourselves.

I mean, my idea was just to pull out something from the climate study, you know, one of those stark results and talk about it. And it has had a reception I just could not have imagined. And I'm glad that it did that to give people voice who haven't had voice before. I'm glad that that's what it did. People were high-fiving me. People were -- have been writing me. And I have to -- I actually have to Tweet about this. There's no way I'm going to get to all the emails that I received. [Laughs]

But I really appreciate the positive response from people across the spectrum, young and old, and not just Black women. So, you know, people throughout the profession. So I appreciate that they wanted this heard. And if it took this long for it to be said and for us to say it, I am sad. That saddens me. But I'm glad it was -- I'm glad it was done.

One of the funny things that happen was, you know, you never know how what you're going to say is going to be received. And certainly if you're, you know, pre-tenure or pre-decision of some sort, you might be a little bit tentative, a little bit cautious about what you're going to say. And, you know, for a few days I didn't go into my department. I was like, "Everybody's going to be mad at me. I don't know if my emails going to work. You know, [Laughs] I don't know if I still have a job."

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: That's real.

DR. LISA COOK: Right [Laughs]. So I was just -- I kept checking, kept logging into my email to make sure, you know, my account hadn't been deleted or my name hadn't been removed from the roster. But, you know, that was just a bit of paranoia, I suppose, in hindsight. But still, I think that some people in the profession are very thin-skinned. If you talk generally

about race as opposed to gender, they just -- they receive it in a very different way. And I would like for us to proceed on both fronts.

And that's why we ended the op-ed piece on a hopeful note, just acknowledging it is the first step. Let's acknowledge it first and as Anna was saying, we've got to come up with some real solutions that run the gamut, that go from one stage of the profession to the other. There are a lot of Black women stuck at the associate professor stage. There are a lot.

That's, I think, possibly because many people in the profession don't want us to see them as -- see us as their peers. And I think that that's a stereotype. That's a stereotype that has existed. If this -- if we're some of the people they haven't come into contact with because we're under-recommended for AP classes, you know, if you don't run into people, you embrace stereotypes. And if all you're watching is *Real Housewives of Atlanta* or something like that, you're not seeing yourself as a peer and that's not the -- that's not the right reference point.

But I think that this is a real issue. And I would hope, as Anna's friend was Tweeting, that more is done once this conversation has gotten started. And I hope that my work with the AEA, now that I've been elected to the executive committee, I hope that we'll be able to implement some of the changes that we've proposed and that others have proposed.

JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: Yeah, so I want to end on that, actually.

What outside of donating to the Sadie Collective, which everyone listening to this podcast should do -- what are kind of some concrete steps that folks can take to -- I mean, I love this analogy to the you have to look at the supply and demand on this issue. That's a very good economical answer [Laughs].

But yeah, so what are some kind of concrete things people can do to help address this problem? I mean, number one, it seems like naming it and acknowledging. What are some other things?

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Sure. So I think institutions need to make a commitment to foster the next generation of Black women economists. And commitment looks like going beyond just reTweeting what Dr. Cook puts out about, you know, supporting Black women or supporting the Sadie Collective.

Commitment looks like, you know, when you see a student who's get advice poorly by one of your colleagues, you snatch them up like Dr. Cook mentioned, and you give them the

mentorship that they need to succeed. Commitment looks like making available resources that students who look like me, a Black woman, wouldn't otherwise see had they not talked to you. So there's different channels, for example, that people learn about -- research assistantships that are something that you do after college that gets you prepared for graduate school. And I would have not known anything about that had I not had a network that facilitated those conversations for me. So commitment looks like bringing Black women into that conversation and giving them the opportunity to be known and to be cultivated in such a way that allows them to realize their full potential.

And I think finally what I will say is that it's really important for professionals and academics to prioritize Black women. And I think what Dr. Cook said was really powerful. We've been actively silenced by this profession -- actively from the beginning of, like, the inception, right? Dr. Alexander was actively silenced by her peers, by her colleagues, by editors, what have you. And so my challenge to listeners who are not Black women who are part of the economic space is to use your power to empower the next generation of Black women who are coming in, as well as your Black women colleagues.

There are a lot of people who have the potential to be incredible economists. And Sadie Alexander's a great example of someone who had the potential to become an incredible economist, but because of racism and sexism compounded upon each other, we missed them completely.

And so the question now becomes: What will you do to ensure that we don't miss the next generation of Black women who are entering economics?

JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: Do you have anything to add, Dr. Cook?

DR. LISA COOK: I just want to say that beyond mentoring, we also need sponsorship and that becomes even more important as people work their way through the economics profession. So that means, you know, when there's a job opening in a place, you get the email. Or for many raises, for example, I hear colleagues saying all the time that they just emailed their dean and show where they had been -- they had been sought out as a person who would vie for that position. You know, encouraging them to apply for that position, that would never work [Laughs], you know, with a Black woman. It just never works.

We're the group that is the least retained when that happens, when there's an outside offer, for example, Black women typically leave if there's an outside offer because the institution

doesn't stand behind them. So I think that academic leaders and those who are prominent in the profession have to take a much more substantial role.

And everybody can take a role. As my colleague Peter Blair was saying, everybody can do something -- mentor, sponsor -- but it has to happen at every stage. It can't be just at the beginning of the pipeline. And that will, you know, that's enough to change things. Opportunity exists at every juncture. So if you're talking about giving equal access to opportunity, you can't do it just at the beginning, it has to be at every single stage. So that's where the profession needs help.

JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: Thank you so much. This has been a thrilling conversation, you both are such deeply passionate and engaging speakers. And, again, thank you so much for taking the time to share your expertise with us on our podcast today.

DR. LISA COOK: Thank you all so much.

ANNA GIFTY OPOKU-AGYEMAN: Thank you.

JHUMPA BHATTACHARYA: And that you all for tuning into this episode of Hidden Truths, the podcast of the Insight Center for Community Economic Development.

You can learn more about Dr. Lisa Cook's work by visiting lisadcook.net or following her on Twitter at @DrLisaDCook.

To learn more about Anna's work, visit sadielcollective.org and follow her on Twitter at @ItsAfronomics.

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Thank you, everyone.

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