

[Music]

PAMELA HARRIS: The Center for Minorities in the Mathematical Sciences presents Mathematically Uncensored,

ARIS WINGER: where our talk is real and complex, but never discrete.

[Music]

ARIS WINGER: Welcome to Mathematically Uncensored where our talk is real and complex,

PAMELA HARRIS: but never discrete! Episode Nine. Unbelievable.

ARIS WINGER: Unbelievable, right.

PAMELA HARRIS: We're almost gonna hit double digits.

ARIS WINGER: I know, should we do something for the 10th one? No

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah, probably. Why not? Should we do a live recording? We've been joking about that, but I think that would be so cool.

ARIS WINGER: 10. No, I appreciate every single one of them.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah. Listeners, let us know if that's of interest. Watching our faces as you

ARIS WINGER: A live one would be wild. Yeah, that would be wild. Yeah. So I think that one of the things that happens in our professional development is that we get caught, at least I get caught up in the comments. Yeah. So whatever, whatever script we have, it'll go off the rails. If I see something in the comments, I'll be like, wait, wait, wait, wait, or whatever. Right.

PAMELA HARRIS: But maybe that's not a bad thing. We are after all, Uncensored.

ARIS WINGER: No, I love it. That's right. And we appeal to the audience. Yeah. Yeah, so we wouldn't need to even prepare. We'd just talk with the audience.

PAMELA HARRIS: So tell me how, how are you? Let's do our check-in.

ARIS WINGER: Oh, good. Yeah. So I've been, I've been thinking about the website, working on it. By the time you all hear this, you should be able to go to ariswinger.com. Right. And so like I've been getting together and I'm just like, okay, what do I want to say about myself? And it's been this balance between, it really has been this balance between. It's my website. So can I just say what I want to say on my

website, or do I have to present myself to the world in which people see me in the best light according to somebody else's standards. Oh yeah. So, so do I want to create a website where people come and say, oh, I want to hire him for a job or do I want to create a website that is just like, If you want to get to know me, here's my website. Right. And so this there's this. Yeah. So in other words, is my, is my website going to be professional, is it going to be personal. It's going to be personal-fessional, right? It's yeah. So I've been thinking about that a lot because I'll write a few things and I'm like, no, that's not really me. And then I'll write something about me. It's like, no, nobody's going to hire me. But then yeah, but it's like, yeah. So I'm just trying to find that balance.

PAMELA HARRIS: Oh. I'd like to give you this advice that a very, very bright friend of mine said to me once, and that friend was you. Authenticity wins!

ARIS WINGER: I know. And that's why, that's why I'm probably just going to just say screw it. And I'm just going to yeah, write whatever I want to write and just be me. Yeah. But let's be clear, as we said, many times in our work that positioning and context matters. I am not looking for a job. When I say hire me, I mean, for the 15th job. And so yeah, if I don't get hired, that will not be a problem. Right. So to our young people out there, like it to be, Oh, I'm telling young people at 25 years old, right. So young people out there. Who are trying to get in and trying to, there are some rules that you still have to follow. I don't feel proud of saying that, but, you know, I think that we have, we found this balance of like, you need to play the game in some instances, and other instances, you don't have to play the game and just trying to find the balance.

PAMELA HARRIS: And I think that's part of the challenge in being a person of color in the mathematical sciences or in academic spaces altogether, because we walk this very thin line that anytime that we do anything, it is potentially, and I hate this, but it is potentially thought to be reflective of an entire community of people.

ARIS WINGER: Yes, yes.

PAMELA HARRIS: Right. And so, yeah, we're, hypervisible in some sense, but then also invisible in others. And so that. Yeah, that's hard, but I'm sorry that you're having to like grapple with that

ARIS WINGER: Oh no, it's great

PAMELA HARRIS: As, listen, I'm over here, just pressing, refresh. What the hell is this error 404 not found ariswinger.com?

ARIS WINGER: Because today's not Wednesday. Today's not Wednesday. Wednesday, when the show comes out, it'll be ready to go. So going back and forth on I know. And just like we said, last week, this notion of perfectionism is showing up. For sure it does not. No, that's not right. No, I want this image. No, this is not the right color. And it's like, no, this thing we've just. Press the button. Publish, publish, publish.

PAMELA HARRIS: Also, it's, it's a version of you with a timestamp, right? It's not a forever version of Dr. Aris Winger. This is a, you're getting it out there. You know, it's just the first preliminary version. Nobody expects it to be perfection. They just expect it to exist, friend.

ARIS WINGER: Yes, absolutely. That's right. Absolutely.

PAMELA HARRIS: Hit publish. I can't wait. Two weeks I've been refreshing that page.

ARIS WINGER: And then to all the people who have been, I apologize.

PAMELA HARRIS: Have you been tracking?

ARIS WINGER: Yeah, no, some people on Twitter have been like, how y'all going to name the episode ariswinger.com and I'm getting this 404.

PAMELA HARRIS: Listen. I mean, they're coming for us. Aris.

ARIS WINGER: No. Okay. I'll take credit for, I'll take the blame.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah, but I think that reminds us. Friends, if you liked the show, please recommend the show to your friends. We're super excited to have listeners from all over the world. Checking out the show. It's surreal to think that people are listening. So thank you so much for the support. Tweet and post about the show. If something, you know, triggers an emotion, if you agree with us, you disagree with us, tweet at us. So we have a hashtag, sorry, not a hashtag, a handle. We have @MathUncensored, also the center. So you [can tweet @minoritymath. You can tweet at me @DPEHarris or at Aris, @ArisWinger. So check us out, give us some love. We will as well

ARIS WINGER: And the, the disagreements are the best ones, right? When someone just pushes back against something that we said, those are really great, because out of that, if you, if you create the conversation well enough, safe enough that, you know, something good can come out of the pushback.

PAMELA HARRIS: Right. And that is, that is the work that we do. All right. So we have a kind of competing perspective.

ARIS WINGER: Maybe

PAMELA HARRIS: It's interesting because the topic of discussion is civility. To be civil or not, is the question.

ARIS WINGER: Yes, yes. And this is kind of tied to what I was just talking about with the website about how am I going to, how am I supposed to be presenting myself to the world? Even on a, even on my own website, right.

PAMELA HARRIS: Damn

ARIS WINGER: I still have some, some thoughts about, wait, is this, do I want to show this or do I want to show that? Right. So now, how is it that we're supposed to be behaving in the mathematics discipline? Right. And, and so, and so, and who gets to decide.

PAMELA HARRIS: That's the part that I'm having trouble with. What does it mean to be civil? You know what I mean? And who gets to decide it, and how does that continue to propagate certain beliefs about who belongs in these spaces,

ARIS WINGER: Let's go to the example. So you're in some meeting and now we're sitting there and, you know, some nonsense gets said.

PAMELA HARRIS: So you call it out

ARIS WINGER: So, okay, so you say, excuse me, I'm not sure about what was just said, and could you explain further. Is that civil?

PAMELA HARRIS: I mean, I guess? You're asking the wrong person, because when I say something like that, apparently I have a tone.

ARIS WINGER: Oh

PAMELA HARRIS: Apparently I make faces. You know, so, and now that we're virtual, people want to see my face. Without my face, they can't actually process what it is that I'm saying or how I intend it or, okay. So the truth is that I make a lot of faces. So if someone knows me and they know what my face kind of contorts to, maybe they understand whether the way that I am saying something along with my face, then implies that I'm upset or mad or angry. Whereas if I just speak it and you don't see my face, then you actually have to listen to what I have to say, and maybe that is harder for you to decide whether I'm being civil or not.

ARIS WINGER: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And yeah, so I think that we, we face a challenge in being civil by default. Right. And so, I know that there are times in which, so I guess there are a couple of things. I know that there are times in which I might not be civil and it just depends on the context and what's come up. Like sometimes, there's some things I've just decided that I'm breaking the civil code.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah.

ARIS WINGER: As in some sense, as in pushing back, like this is not something I'm going to I've, I've decided there's some things I'm just not going to be civil about, but again, that's because of positioning and what I'm willing to risk and put on the line. You have to decide for yourself.

PAMELA HARRIS: Right

ARIS WINGER: Yeah. But I mean, and then there are other things where I'm like, okay, this one I'm going to keep calm about. Right. But the bottom line is that, I'm even doing that according to somebody else's rules. Right. That, that, that there's something that we aren't, that we don't talk about in the discipline. About how to behave, how to speak in order for you to get respect and opportunities, right?

PAMELA HARRIS: Oof

ARIS WINGER: Yes. Yes. Yes. Cause I've heard many times they do this in the NSF funding, they spend a lot of times just making sure that the people who review don't judge based upon grammar and how it's written and stuff like this. Right. Because at least they have figured out that the delivery system is not reflective of the value of the person.

PAMELA HARRIS: Wow.

ARIS WINGER: That if, at least they've done it at, at a superficial level, right. That, that how you bring your words does not mean, you know, does not determine your value as a person

PAMELA HARRIS: But that doesn't tend to happen. Period.

ARIS WINGER: It does not. No, this is why we bring it up.

PAMELA HARRIS: But the thing that I struggled with a lot is the fact that, as a person of color, and I think, and I think this is a very, very widely shared experience, that when we speak and we have passion about a particular topic. That is how I describe it, I am passionate about this. This is why I'm speaking out about it. That all of a

sudden the label is not that I'm passionate, it's that I am intimidating, that I am bossy, that I am angry. And I'm like, what? Why, why is it that I don't get, wow. She's really passionate about this. Or, you know, I get the, I've been told, you know, at one point in my life, one point, let's say multiple points in my life. I've been told that I'm intimidating, right. Like, oh, but you're just so intimidating and I'm like, let's back up. It is not that I am intimidating. It is that you might be intimidated by me. This is not a me problem.

ARIS WINGER: Yes. Yes yes yes.

PAMELA HARRIS: This happens so often to women and to people of color that I'm sick of contorting myself, of making myself small, of diminishing my voice to fit some sort of mold so that people. Then what? Listen to me? They didn't, they don't listen to me period.

ARIS WINGER: Yes. Yes. Here we are back at the game again. Right? So how, when, when, when can you be civil? When can you not be civil? When can you, yeah, I mean, it is. It's, it's exhausting.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah.

ARIS WINGER: Yeah. I mean, it is just, yeah. I mean, because I feel like there's also this cultural element because you know, you and I, and you talked about this many, many shows ago about being in your own space. Right. You can like when you're with Alicia right. Then I'm sure you and you and her are going back and forth. Loud, quote, loud.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

ARIS WINGER: And, and there's no intimidation. There's no, right. So, so the question, so the question becomes, so, so what is it that we're asking people to do then? Right. I mean, if you're, if someone's in a meeting with you, right. And now you get passionate. Right. And they start to feel intimidated. What are they supposed to do?

PAMELA HARRIS: Ask questions. Clarify, try to understand, rather than react.

ARIS WINGER: And not take it personally

PAMELA HARRIS: Not take it personally! We're talking about something. We're having a conversation. And yes, I am loud. And I'm not saying that all Latinos are loud. Okay. Like don't, don't tweet at me about that. I'm not saying that I am saying I, personally, as a human being, I am a very loud individual and, I'm kind of hard of hearing, not officially. Right. But like, it runs in my family, you know. Like Cara

can be, you know, my daughter can be five feet from me and she's saying something I'm like, what'd you say? I scream and she's like, I just told you. I'm going, I didn't hear you. You know? And so part of, part of the challenge that I face is that we don't, I don't get the benefit of the doubt. You know, if, if I'm passionate about something, immediately, I don't get the benefit of the doubt that maybe I'm just trying to communicate something I'm passionate about. You know, instead I get the, she's angry, so, you know, let's let her calm down and then eventually we'll actually listen to what she has to say

ARIS WINGER: Or let's not bring it up again.

PAMELA HARRIS: Or let's never have this conversation again because she gets loud and I'm uncomfortable, you know? And so part of, part of the issue for me is that if I am passionate about something, I just. I just want people to listen to me and actually listen to understand, rather than just like to reply whatever it is that they want. And if you are getting all up in your emotions and feeling all sorts of way, acknowledge it. "I'm sorry, I'm not in the position right now to be able to really take in what you're saying. Maybe can we revisit this conversation at a different time?" That's ok. Shutting me down and then saying, well, we just need to be civil, we just need to be civil. What you're saying is offensive. Well, you're saying is that I don't fit whatever mold of civility you have set to be the bar. And here's the thing. We never set ground rules for our conversations. So how about we do that? How about we set ground rules, and I get to set them. So if you're monotone as hell, then you don't care about this. Right?

ARIS WINGER: Yes, yes.

PAMELA HARRIS: What if that was the rule? Because I mean, that happens when we teach, right? We try to convey enthusiasm for a subject by changing the tone of our voice,

ARIS WINGER: Modulating

PAMELA HARRIS: modulating, emphasizing. So when I do that for a particular thing, why is that not thought to be positive, like when it is in my teaching?

ARIS WINGER: Yes, yes, yes, yes. That's interesting. No, and what you bring up as that there, because you have not. You know, because there's been no discussion about the rules of communication and civility. Then we default to a standard that we know who the people who made them is.

PAMELA HARRIS: And it wasn't me.

ARIS WINGER: Right, right. Yeah. Yeah. And so then what would it look like now when we start the, when we reopened that? So again, here we are, again, challenging cultural narratives that have gone unchallenged. And say, well, wait, how are we going to speak in this space? Let's take three minutes to talk about how are we going to speak in this space? Does loud mean angry? How does passion show up in this space? Right, so that we don't get confused.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah. And this reminds me of all the times when, when I was in graduate school and I had a, a friend, Jill, who would say, you know, it's really easy to find you. And I was like, what do you mean? And she's like, well, if I ever want to figure out where in the department you are, the first thing I do is go to your office. If you're not there, what I do is I just stand still. I stand still and I just wait for you to laugh.

ARIS WINGER: Oh that's great

PAMELA HARRIS: And I will find you because she said, you know, you laugh every so often that I knew that if I just waited patiently five minutes later, at the most, I would hear you cackle, somewhere in the department. So I would just follow your laughter. And I thought, wow. That's really interesting. I never thought about it that way, you know, but she looked at in a way that was like really positive and like affirming, you know, rather than other ways that people have taken it, that, you know, they're like you're being extra loud. And I'm like, well, this is my office and this is who I am. Now, you're asking me, come to your office and be somebody else. Because you don't fit here, you being loud, it's obnoxious. Right. And so, yeah, we, yeah, I've made myself small at places where it was just clear that no matter what I did, whether I did make myself smaller or not, it still wasn't going to matter. I still didn't belong.

ARIS WINGER: Right, right.

PAMELA HARRIS: But, here, has this happened to you though? You know that since we're on the subject, so we've all had these experiences as people of color in these rooms, where we say something and then, you know, it's like the civility, the flag gets thrown in as a offense.

ARIS WINGER: Right. Right.

PAMELA HARRIS: Nobody stands up for you. Nobody says, Hey, well, they were just communicating. This is how they communicate, you know? The question of whether you're being professional or not, maybe it's also

sort of bubbling at the surface, but then you get the emails after the meeting, you get these supportive emails? Oh my God. So emails after the meetings, it's like some stuff goes down at this meeting. Somebody says something inappropriate, you know, they take, they take your words or your passion, and then they immediately try to bring you down, saying you're being too much of whatever. Then you get these emails from your white colleagues, oh I'm really sorry. I agreed with you. This is important. And, you know, thank you so much for bringing it up like thanks, and I'm like the fuck too late.

ARIS WINGER: Yes. Oh yes. And this is the, this is the sign and the catalyst for my lack of optimism. And I'm speaking to everybody out there that, yeah, no, I mean, I mean, it is because I, you know, I spent a lot of my life being a deep optimist. Right. And so, but yeah, the evidence when, and this is because this is about courage, right? This is just a lack of courage, right? When, when you know something is wrong, you're watching it and you're watching somebody fight alone and then you show up after the risk has gone. Cowardice at the highest level. Cowardice at the highest level. And look, we all are cowards at certain moments, right? I was, you know? Yeah. So, you know, I've had to deal with male supremacy and patriarchy and being silent year after year after year being in the face of that. But it's one of these things that, you know, we all need to be held accountable to ourselves and to the type of person we want to be. So I don't need any of those emails. Just wasting your time.

PAMELA HARRIS: Not only that it's now hijacking me emotionally after the content of the meeting, and now you're bringing any be bringing me back into that same space and then making me realize that you. Whatever you have to say behind the scenes is meaningless to me. You're just making more work for me now to kind of wipe up your white tears, right? Like, whoa, that was messed up. Like, I don't want to hear it. I seriously don't want to hear it because you chose your comfort over being actually an advocate and a supporter in that space. You missed the opportunity.

ARIS WINGER: That's right. That's right.

PAMELA HARRIS: And whatever you cannot say in public, that shit you don't mean.

ARIS WINGER: Yes. Oh my goodness. If I say, I think, it's big that word you said. Your opportunity is gone. And opportunity was at so many different levels: opportunity for you to grow as a person and overcome your comfort, opportunity to send a message to the people in that room. Opportunity to create a whole new dialogue opportunity, to

make an ally in you. Right? There's so many things you missed out on because you just want to sit there and your silence is going to get you nothing. The silence gets you nothing.

PAMELA HARRIS: No, their silence gets them their comfort, Aris. It's about comfort

ARIS WINGER: Right. But they already had that. Nothing extra. They get. Yeah. They get absolutely nothing more from just sitting there. Yeah. So, and again, we, you know, we write about this, that, you know, we just. Yeah. I mean, at the end of the day your comfort is going to be the thing that I, that you're going to have to face. Right. And so, again, don't say you want to do any of this work. Don't say you're down for us. If you're trying to be comfortable.

PAMELA HARRIS: And, and how does this apply then to our people? Right? So I live by the motto that if I'm uncomfortable, I'm going to voice that out. And I've done that at every stage of my career, even when I was a post-doc, even when I was, you know, pre-tenure faculty and, and I've had to live with the repercussions of being very vocal.

ARIS WINGER: I was about to say, you know.

PAMELA HARRIS: Very vocal.

ARIS WINGER: Would you recommend that?

PAMELA HARRIS: I'm going to say, I'm going to say that this is a very personal decision that every single person needs to make. But here are the questions that I asked myself every time that I have the opportunity to speak out against something that I think needs to be spoken out against. Can I sleep well at night? Because there's been times where I haven't spoken out. There's been times where, you know, something happens and most of the time it's like the sheer shock of something that gets said leaves me at a loss of words. Right. And I just, I I'm like, no, like, can't even like form a sentence. And what happens when that occurs is, I spend the next 48 hours, 72 hours processing and thinking about all of the things I could have said.

ARIS WINGER: Yes. That's the work we're talking about

PAMELA HARRIS: And that's the work. And then I save that in my back pocket. So that the next time it happens I'm ready.

ARIS WINGER: As a tool

PAMELA HARRIS: as a tool. Because I know that if I don't do that, I'm back into that 48, 72 hour hell. It is hell. I repeat the comment over

and over again in my head. I can't sleep. You know, I, I can't take care of myself. That's how deeply this shit impacts me. And then when it gets said and it's about a student, Oh my God. It's like a hundred times worse. And so I've had to be very cognizant that that's how I was processing through these traumatic experiences and having a set of things, a set of tools, a set of sentences, a set of questions that I would just immediately default to and make the muscle memory, allowed me to deal with that much better. Then it does mean that I am constantly the one asking the questions. And I am constantly the target of well, civility

ARIS WINGER: That's right. What did you lose out on going in this direction?

PAMELA HARRIS: Nothing. Okay. Maybe some potential friends in the department, but I did not go there to make friends. I went there to make sure that I did a job that they were paying me for. And if they're not gonna go along the ride to make this math community better, I don't need them as friends.

ARIS WINGER: Right, right.

PAMELA HARRIS: That's, that's the key.

ARIS WINGER: Powerful. Powerful.

PAMELA HARRIS: let's go on to the second topic of discussion for today, which is graduate programs. What's going on?

ARIS WINGER: Oh, so yes. So, so I think we need to look at, I think we're noticing, well intentioned-ness in this place, right? So this is hard to frame. So in a sense that what's been going on racially in this country has allowed people to really, some people, you know, in a lot of ways have opened their eyes. Like we need to do something, we need to do something. We need to do something. And so what we're noticing is an uptick in, in our communities of people being accepted to graduate schools and people of color, and there being a sensitivity towards people of color and their positioning in the country. Which is fantastic, right? So I think more people being accepted. And so where I think we need to go is accepting is one part of this process. Now let's step all the way back. Now, we already said that we are moving towards a space where we are no longer going to be the puppets of graduate schools. That we are no longer going to be, you know, let me go groveling to a graduate school. Right? Take me, take me, take me, take me, take me. Right. Because then you get, as you said so many times, Dr. Harris, that you know, I get you get there. And then I get

used as a tool. I get put up on your website. I get used in your data. I get used. Right. Some people get kind of twice in the data.

PAMELA HARRIS: Twice

ARIS WINGER: I'm not saying who, because my co-host.

PAMELA HARRIS: Me. Me.

ARIS WINGER: That's right. Yeah. And so we're trying to end that. And so, so to all my people out there who are now being accepted, you know, and you know, and you're, you're feeling the love and rightfully so. We still have to ask the question: Yes, thank you for the acceptance. You are lucky. And what is it that I get for the five years that I'm there. Right? Yeah. So let, let's put this, put the whole thing into perspective. We're talking about five, six year process, right? And the acceptance is 0.1% of it. That's great. And now we got this other six years. What's now going to, and we talked about this about Madison. In our professional development. Madison was a character who was a black woman who was going to a predominantly white space and you know

PAMELA HARRIS: Accepted to Yale.

ARIS WINGER: That's right. And so fictionally. And so it's one of these things where, you know, everyone looks at the name and just like, and the name dictates the rest of the story because in the United States of America, we love the underdog story. We uplift the underdog story. And so everyone becomes the underdogs. So then she goes in and then everyone was like, oh my gosh, she's going to get something from Yale. And that's going to be fantastic. Right. But we don't look at all the stuff that, you know, she would have to go through being a black woman in the United States of America and what we really don't look at as that, that, you know, only one out of in Madison's actually get to finish their PhDs in the first place. Right. And so, so what we need to do is be on both sides, be super wary of people who are just like, yo, come here, come here, come over here and spend five years with us. And the people who are saying, come over here, come over here, spend five years with us. What are you going to do way beyond just accepting this person, right?

PAMELA HARRIS: And I think it's part of a narrative change that we're trying to push on this math community, because we have constant conversations about whether a student is ready to pursue graduate programs you know, graduate education. Are they ready? Have they taken a year-long sequence of algebra and analysis? Have they seen topology?

How about asking whether these graduate programs are ready to receive students?

ARIS WINGER: Yes, yes

PAMELA HARRIS: It requires us to think about what it is that a graduate program must offer in addition to coursework. And I use myself as an example, a lot of the times, you know, moving to the middle of nowhere, Massachusetts, you know, that I have to amazon myself tortillas. Have I told you that shit? I can't find the kind of food that I normally eat. I have to drive to Albany, New York an hour and 15 minutes away so I can find stuff to make like stews that I would normally make. And so the reality is that, you know, for, for our people, we show up to these spaces and you know, are they even cognizant of that?

ARIS WINGER: No, so, but I hear them, I hear them. You're just needy.

PAMELA HARRIS: Again, the narrative needs to change because then your school is not ready for me.

ARIS WINGER: That's right. And also, yeah, that's right. And, and I don't even think of it as needy, because if it is the case, that you bring anybody, because so the dominant group all has always gotten most of what they've ever needed. But what, what would it look like if they didn't, right. They don't have any experience of going to spaces where they don't have the things that they need. Right. And so we get called needy because, you know, we go to a space that's not been built for us. There are some things that in order for us to be our best selves, we might need them. They aren't here. And then all of a sudden we're again, the ones that we're again, we're the problem.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah. That's, it's the narrative, right? It's, it's a very classical narrative of deficit thinking for people of color. And now it's like, now, in addition to that, we need to make sure you can get tortillas.

ARIS WINGER: That's right. That's right. Yeah. But you know what happens when, when a big company hires a superstar, they pay for their moving expenses. They look at the neighborhoods they might want to move into. They do all these things. When you value somebody enough. And you hire them to bring them to come to your company, then you do all these things for them. And yet, somehow we don't do that, you know, from the graduate school experience. Right. We have to ask ourselves why not?

PAMELA HARRIS: Because they think that they're doing us a favor. They're saving us. They're saving us, Aris. Yes. And then we're going to owe them. And we should be thankful that we got let in to these spaces

ARIS WINGER: And again, we're talking on both sides to the students. No one is doing your favorite cause maybe you might've earned that. So you might've earned.

PAMELA HARRIS: And can we talk about the process? The process is you go get a PhD and then you end up working on your PhD advisor's area of research, solving problems that they're interested in. So you're working for them. That's really what that is. You're solving their problem.

ARIS WINGER: Yes. Yes.

PAMELA HARRIS: You don't owe anyone shit. You're working for like basically minimum wage.

ARIS WINGER: Yes. Oh, for the work, for the hours, dollars divided by the hours. Yeah.

PAMELA HARRIS: Don't do it. Nobody's gonna go to graduate school, don't do it.

ARIS WINGER: No, the federal government's going to step in and be like, no, that's

PAMELA HARRIS: That's illegal.

ARIS WINGER: That's right. You don't want to do that division.

PAMELA HARRIS: What do we need to do? Right. So if what we want is this narrative change to happen at these graduate programs? That it's not just about asking whether the student is ready for your program, but asking whether the program you're at is ready for students. So we've got to have a call to action

ARIS WINGER: Yes, yes, absolutely. So that means in a lot of ways that we've got to have people bringing this up. Right. And so now here's, we got to play the game. Here we go. Right. And so this means that, you know, if you want to change the narrative about this stuff, and that means that, when people start asking you to come to their department, then it's time for you to bring up some hard questions. And by the way, if they're questions that are legit, like, so let's get the big question: are you a space that's ready for me? Now, that's too heavy. You gotta break that into chunks.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah, they're gonna be like what do you mean?

ARIS WINGER: So then you, then you break down. What does it mean to have me. Right. What are the seven things? What are the 15 things that it means to have me in your space for five years? Right. So do you have, tell me about your city. Does it have a large black community, Middle Eastern community, whatever you are, right? That's it. That's what you need. Right. And what was the last time you graduated somebody who looked like me, right? You say that, however, nicely you need to say it. And what is, tell me about your faculty. Right. And, and what we might realize is that if everybody does that, then it sends the message that it might be important enough for people like us.

PAMELA HARRIS: And so I think there's the opportunity right here for listeners to tweet questions that students should be asking. That they should be asking as they're getting accepted into these graduate programs, because we're close to that time where people need to make their commitments and say where they're going to go.

ARIS WINGER: Oh that's right.

PAMELA HARRIS: It's right around this time. And so it would be wonderful for us to start, you know, a thread where we're just talking about what should you be asking? These graduate programs to suss out whether they're the right program for you. And so, you know, we started a list. So let me read the ones that we thought about. So, you know, you're, you're a student of color, you show up and they say, here's your acceptance letter. You know, here, you might want to ask, what is the plan to hire more tenure track faculty of color during the next five years I'll be here?

ARIS WINGER: Yes.

PAMELA HARRIS: And then let's just see what happens. Let's just hear them out. Or how about, and you alluded to this one, so, you know, not only when was the last time a black mathematician graduated from your program, but who was the first? Are they the same person?

ARIS WINGER: That's right, right, right. Yeah. Go ahead. No, I was going to say it when the department, the department in it is, there is so. I want to be clear that because I hear them and they're just like, wait, we haven't done anything. So should we just not try? Right. It is not so much in the answer of the number exactly, as much as it is an acknowledgement of the truth and some plans to do something different, right. That you are going, that you are making plans, that it's important enough to you, that you're doing something substantial

to try and make that happen. Right. But if you're just going to be like, nah, we haven't done anything, but come anyway.

PAMELA HARRIS: that sends a good message

ARIS WINGER: yeah, yeah, yeah. It's just like, that doesn't work, right? Yeah. We haven't done anything. We don't plan on doing anything, but you know, We are going to start with you.

PAMELA HARRIS: But it's MIT. Why do they have to do anything?

ARIS WINGER: Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.. And this is the big, big fight we have to do with narrative. Again, we've been saying this for nine episodes, deep. That is the name going to be, is it going to overcome the fact that they're not prepared or give a damn about us, right. That, so, and again, that's a personal thing, right? But I've seen too much pain. I've seen too many people drop out, who would have crushed it at another school. I see. I just, I've seen so many PhDs go to waste because let's be clear that this is the other thing that we don't want to say. When you, when you leave one program, it is hard to come back and restart and get your PhD somewhere else. Like it is. So, I mean, this is something we want to get right, the first time. And so, so I have, I've been struggling too with the name versus what's the best place for you as a full human. Yeah, yeah, yeah,

PAMELA HARRIS: But part of the problem that I see, and, and I've experienced this somewhat, you know, as, as a tenure track faculty member at an "elite" liberal arts school, it feels good to feel wanted at a quote unquote, top place. Yes, it feels good. Right? It's like, well, look, they want me and they really really want me.

ARIS WINGER: That's great. That doesn't mean you have to say yes.

PAMELA HARRIS: Shit. Why you gotta do me like that, Aris?

ARIS WINGER: Yeah, you can, you can be wanted, but we're not going out. Thank you for buying me the beer, yeah, I appreciate you buying me the drink and I'll drink it, but you need to leave. Yeah. No. So we're not going out. That was a good move. I liked your line. That line was cool, but nah. Cause I heard about you. I talked to your other, your past partners, you're abusive. This drink was good but you need to leave. And that's what we need to do. Look, and again, if you choose to go to these places, you can, but again, I'm coming up with a list. It's not going to work

PAMELA HARRIS: The one thing I've been saying. You know, a lot of the times it's like a PhD is a PhD is a PhD. At the end of the day, you have this PhD and it opens up a set of doors. And the problem is that

we see the propagating or, you know, I don't know what the right word is. We see, you know, person get PhD at Yale, get, you know, postdoc at Princeton, get tenure track at MIT. And the thing is that if that is your goal right, as a person of color, and I have students who, who literally have said to me, my goal is to get into MIT. That's like their, their goal in life to get into MIT, to get their degree at MIT. And part of me is like, I'm here to support you, if that's your goal, let's see how we can make that happen. But I'm really worried about what you're bringing up, which is this trauma that happens at these spaces. And the second that you recognize that you know, them wanting you, but you then getting there. It doesn't mean that they're going to support you or make sure that you thrive and have what you need to survive in these spaces. And then you end up, you know, just dropping out. Like, I, I feel all sorts of ways. Like, so how can I, as a person of color, mentor other people of color without actually acknowledging that this can happen.

ARIS WINGER: That's right

PAMELA HARRIS: And we need a backup plan, right. We need a backup plan, like, okay, let's, let's go, let's try it. Let's do it. We'll get you in. But then. Who's going to support this student?

ARIS WINGER: That's right. That's right. And then you bring up two things in my mind. The first is we should also ask what is your graduation rate?

PAMELA HARRIS: Ooh, the graduation rate.

ARIS WINGER: You bring in n people. So we've got, in other words, we got some fractions. We need to talk that, so right. We got, we bring in people in general. How many of those people finish? What percentage of those people you bring in, in people of color, how many of those people finish? Right. And they all of it. Right. And so, yeah, you need to ask that too, because it's, because what we're realizing through the core grant that we talked about last week is that departments are starting to distinguish themselves right, about what they care about. Right? Some departments care about research and all this other stuff. Other departments care about creating PhDs. Right. And maybe a couple of them may care about both. Right. And so just, you know, you need to figure out what type of department they are. Right. And so in your questions, right. And it will come out and you have to ask yourself, can I get through this? And then the other thing you bring up is yeah. I mean, just getting in is different from support through the process. Right. I mean. And you have to think about that, but this is what always happens, that the pain and the

trauma of getting through has been rendered so mute versus the loudness of the prestige of the place. That, that, that MIT and Yale ring so much loudly, so much more loudly than the people who had to suffer through and finish. Right. And so we, so for me, I want to give voice to those people. Cause they're, they're often too silent.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah. Well, because the trauma is real. It's like speaking out about, it means you have to relive it. But I think what you're pointing here is to the idea that we need to start thinking about how we distribute these accolades, right? Like when we say MIT and we're all like, "AHHH," you know, it's like, wait, I

ARIS WINGER: Can I have that on a recording? I want to press a button and it's just you doing that like just you doing that

PAMELA HARRIS: I got loud, sorry about that. So it's like, we need to change the way that we're not saying stop. You know, thinking that MIT is a wonderful prestigious research institution. We're thinking, we're trying to get people to think about other things that are valuable and how those things might be more important than being at the top of some list that people paid to be on. Because there's a lot of money involved in getting on those high ranking things. Right. And so how do we change that? Like how do we move from being, you know, loving our Jordans? To loving the Payless brand shoes.

ARIS WINGER: Yeah. I'm not saying that's the direct analogy, but I get it, but yeah, no, I think it is a change in narrative. It is a change in narrative. And so that means we have to create counter stories. We have to keep talking. We have to keep speaking out. We have to keep talking to young people. Because you're a student, you know, and I wouldn't have felt this way five years ago, but you're a student who says, all I want to do is to get into MIT, I'm deeply concerned. Because it's, because now this is a seeking of prestige and you have to ask at what costs, what costs, right? I mean, what is it? And so somebody who says that I, I need a, I need to hear a serious plan about getting through it. So in other words, When they say that I'm, my response is what is it that you want MIT to do for you?

PAMELA HARRIS: Because they should be worth it, because what you're implying here is that the question is they should be worthy of having you.

ARIS WINGER: That's right, because you going there, that means you want to use them for something bigger than them. Not to just go there because now your name gets associated with that place. And it means you're great. You're already great, right? The question is what can MIT do for you? What's, you're going there because you want them to do

what, what did they have that you will get that improves your life? Not just, you know, going there and just being like I'm in. Am I right?

PAMELA HARRIS: But what you're hinting at and maybe not hinting you're you're flat out saying is that we need to recognize our own worth without it coming from these external institutions with some name recognition. And I think that's really hard. That's hard.

ARIS WINGER: No, and that's why yes. And that's why we have to talk about the pain. Yeah. Right. That's why, and that's why we have to talk about the people who go there to some of these places. And it's just like, I'm not sure if that was worth it. Or people who say it in the sideways, well, it was difficult. I didn't have any friends and I had to work around the clock and it was really competitive and I felt like I wanted to drop out five or six times. But I got through

PAMELA HARRIS: I got through it. Look at me now, let me see all the wonderful things I've done since then.

ARIS WINGER: Yeah, that's right. That's right. That's right. In spite of that. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

PAMELA HARRIS: So I think we kind of have this like, nice recipe that students need to be asking these tough questions. Mentors should be asking these tough questions, right, before you recommend a program. And this whole is also let me be real clear that this also holds for other things, not just graduate programs. This holds for REUs, internships. If you're going to recommend them to your students, you better have done some legwork and asked these tough questions. And if we're asking these tough questions and these programs can not readily answer what they've done, acknowledged that maybe they haven't done all that they need to do, addressing their weaknesses and then laying out some plans for the future. Then we shouldn't be recommending them.

ARIS WINGER: That's right. That's right. Oh no, why we're here. Let's go ahead and be clear that we need to use and say, and call out that you're talking about a person of color that my student, you know, Amanda, Jamal, whomever is a black person and they're coming to your white place.

And so I have to ask the following question. Yeah, there's just, I don't. And so here we are. Oh, here we are back again to the courage, because that's, that's hard, that's hard to ask, right. Because, but that's the narrative change that we need. So let's call out the identities of these people, right? Because it matters. Yeah, it matters.

PAMELA HARRIS: Ooh, grab-bag question.

ARIS WINGER: Let's do it.

PAMELA HARRIS: Okay. So here's the question that we got, if every, and this is about the self-nomination process that we talked about in the last episode. And so somebody asked us if everybody already knows or assumes that this game is rigged, in terms of these, like awards, why should we even be nominating ourselves? Like, we already know who's going to win or say, we already know who's gonna get this job, this internal candidate. So like, if all of this is this game that we keep alluding to is completely rigged. Why should we even play?

ARIS WINGER: Yeah, no, that's, it's a balance, right? Because I mean, there's an initial response that I have that, that, that sounds like someone who, that sounds too defeatist, right? I mean, it just sounds like, yeah, let's not just play at all. But so, and trust me that there's truth to the connection game, right? That, yeah. Connections rule the game in a lot of ways. Right. And so I guess my response is that, that also, if what you're saying is right, then that means that you also need to be down with some of those connections, like you have to. So, so if you know that people are winning from doing Z, then you need to be doing Z. But Z also includes applying what you need to apply and also have those connections that might get you wherever you need to go. But yeah, I mean, I, we have to try, we have to keep trying. Yeah. Yeah.

PAMELA HARRIS: And then, you know, if it all fails, you build your own shit.

ARIS WINGER: Yes

PAMELA HARRIS: So maybe as part of the center, we started giving our own teaching awards. And we started giving our own research awards, right? It's like, that's the part that I find very interesting. That again, we're seeking recognition from organizations who don't have us as their primary target audience. And so we, we often don't maybe make the top list of who's going to win this award, but I think you're absolutely right. That if you don't play, you don't win. And so I live for applying for stuff and not getting it because I'm like, at least they have to read my name on it. At least they have to look at my application and then they have to look at me and tell me, they said, no.

ARIS WINGER: Yes.

PAMELA HARRIS: And so that's uncomfortable as that may be, I'm just going to continue to apply for stuff.

ARIS WINGER: That's right. And you might win sometimes

PAMELA HARRIS: Some small percentage of that. Right. And then apparently you win one and then the rest kind of trickled down. So might as well just try that.

ARIS WINGER: It might be worth it. Yeah, absolutely.

PAMELA HARRIS: Absolutely. So here we go. I have to hold you accountable. What is your 5% change?

ARIS WINGER: Oh yeah, no, I've been working on the website. Yeah. I've been working on a website. Yeah, no, I mean, I mean, I've been working on some other stuff too, right. I mean, I've been working on just the usual stuff of trying to just see everybody in the classroom. I'm still. I'm struggling now, again, with the students who are out there on the screen, I have no idea what to do. So, email mu@minoritymath.org, what are your best, you know, strategies for reaching somebody? You know, who's just out there in the zoom world and just, yeah, it's hard to connect with them. So always struggling with that.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah. So I'm living day by day. I feel like I've been a lot busier lately. And so I feel like I have failed at my checking in with all my students, right. Now, you know, class has been going on for a week, like week and a half. This is our second week of class for second week of class. And I had a, an earlier meeting with some of my students and I just started with business. I was like, all right, here's the agenda, you know? And then I paused. And I was like, wait, no, how are you? And he took, it was like surreal because I'm often like, how are you doing? You know? And I caught myself feeling so just busy and overwhelmed, and like kind of tired of having so many zoom back to back meetings that I, I am struggling with continuing this pattern that I, I was doing very well, you know, last semester. And the second semester of pandemic that I'm now failing in third semester, which is just doing those quick check-ins with students. And so I think this is less a 5% change, more of a 5% fail. And so I'm putting it on the record so that I do better next time, because I didn't like that at all. Like I had, so I'm teaching a research class. I think I've mentioned this before. So this research class has students paired up in very small groups, so we're just working on a research project. And so there's so much room for us to just have fun and get to know each other, that there's no excuse, there's no predetermined amount of work that we need to get done. This is like

exploring and creative. And so the fact that I defaulted to the "what's on the agenda for today?" blew my mind.

ARIS WINGER: Yes.

PAMELA HARRIS: Because I was like, this is my first meeting with students for that class. Why did I do that? And so I think this is where I recognize again, we're always going to mess up. Yeah, it's what you do when you admit that you could have been better that's important. And so I'm putting this on the record. I will do better. I will start my research tutorial meetings, just checking in on my students because they vdeserve that.

ARIS WINGER: And what you just said reminds me of like, of that you have to protect yourself. And what do I mean by that? I mean, that the behavior that you just described was not you.

PAMELA HARRIS: It wasn't me.

ARIS WINGER: Right? And so in, in the process of what you're going through and being super busy, you're losing yourself. And so now you have to protect yourself by doing something different. That's interesting. Yeah.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah. So that's, that's my plan. My failed attempt at those connections.

ARIS WINGER: We're going to ask next episode.

PAMELA HARRIS: I'm going to do better. I have it on a sticky note right here on my computer. How are you? How are you? That's the question? Zoom. How are you?

ARIS WINGER: And you know what that, while we're here, that little sticky note, that's your 5%. Yeah. Right. Putting that up there is so huge. So huge.

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah. That's, that's what we're going to do. All right. We end the show always with our announcements. So today we have an announcement for the EDGE program. Applications are due March 12th that makes sure you check them out and apply at edgeforwomen.org.

ARIS WINGER: Oh my goodness that program is legendary

PAMELA HARRIS: Lifechanging. Yes. So please, please, please apply.

ARIS WINGER: Go ahead and register for USTARS, underrepresented students in topology and algebra seminar, which will be held virtually at ICERM on April 29th and 30th. Register at ustars.org.

PAMELA HARRIS: And that's the first conference I ever went to where I met tons of people of color. I love it.

ARIS WINGER: Oh, is that right?

PAMELA HARRIS: Yeah I met my first collaborator there. Yeah. It's amazing. I think it's year, I think it's year 10 this year.

ARIS WINGER: Are you serious? They're probably going to do it that well. Congratulations to them

PAMELA HARRIS: We also want you to sign up for stuff on the Center, so make sure you go to minoritymath.org, sign up for the podcast. Of course, check out our blog, resources. We have lots going on there. Check it out.

ARIS WINGER: Excellent. Is that episode nine right there?

PAMELA HARRIS: Yes.

ARIS WINGER: Excellent. Excellent. Well, we're going to try and pick out how to do it up hardcore for 10. Alright, thanks everybody. You've been listening to Mathematically Uncensored, where our talk is real and complex.

PAMELA HARRIS: But never discrete! All right friends.

ARIS WINGER: Thank you, sister.

PAMELA HARRIS: See you later.

ARIS WINGER: Bye

[Music]