

BSC _ Episode 12 _ Dr Wilmon and Dr Toni _ Final




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SPEAKERS

Dr. Toni Jeanine Harris, Dr. Thomas, Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III, Dr. Fowles

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-  **Dr. Fowles** 00:14
Today's episode of the Black Social Capital podcast, which is to rising researchers who Dr. Jaqui and I interviewed in the summer of 2020. Our first guest, Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III is the Director of PRISM and the National Equity Network at the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center. He spoke with us then, about his now completed dissertation unearthing the racialized experiences of Black staff in higher education. Later, our second guest, Dr. Toni Jeannine Harris, sheds light on the experiences of K 12 professionals, as they balanced the need for impact with the ever- growing need for self care. Together, these experts provide necessary insights about professionals that are far too often overlooked. Now, take a listen to our conversation with Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III.
 -  **Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III** 01:12
Hey, glad to be here. Thanks for having me.
 -  **Dr. Thomas** 01:15
Awesome, we're really glad to have you. So we're gonna go ahead and get started today

with our Intellectual Capital segment, this is a discussion of a Black scholar's research, academic journey or current events in the professional world. Today, we are going to hear about Wilmon's research. So I'm going to go ahead and get started with that first question. Which is, what is the topic of your research? And how did you become interested in it?

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Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III 01:45

Really great question. The topic of my research, you know, I'm focused on as you know, as you read in my bio, um, you know, broadly focused on workplaces and equity in workplace higher education, workplaces, looking at the racialized workplace experiences of Black higher education staff and administrators. So, you know, coming out of grad school in 2012, I had been pretty familiar with campus climate work, right, you know, using campus climate survey data, and findings in papers that I've written, you know, and having really great professors and graduate school, I'm a Penn State University graduate school alum by the way. And, you know, during my time there, you know, much was made of kind of understanding campus ecosystems. You know, the different folks who work there who attend school there. The interplay between all those parties, so on and so forth, psycho social dynamics, all that, right. I want to explore what are the other racialized experiences of Black folks, specifically. I always wanted to study Black folk, I know, since I got into graduate school and made a shift to studying higher education, I want to study Black folk, and just kind of get the racialized employment experiences to help broaden what we know about higher education employment experiences. So yeah.

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Dr. Fowles 03:23

Just tell me a little bit more about about that research process. So what what what technologies are helped you along the way to kind of shape this, this, this process for you?

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Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III 03:35

I think, for the most part, you know, there are going to be as, Black people working in higher education, I think, you know, there are going to be racialized experiences, but that- I also wanted to capture narratives of success, right? So there is some anti deficit success, kind of thinking going on here that kind of helped me shape, how I went about the research, I really want to, you know, uncover how folks are both experiencing racial mistreatment, but how within a hostile workplace there x Black people are excelling, right? Because there's a savvy there that I want to that I'm that I'm seeking to uncover unearth. So for me, I already know that, hey, we know that. I think there are reams of data that talk about racial equity, and higher education, quantitative data talking about that, right. But

we don't know a lot about and why my research is qualitative, is that we, we need to know like, how people are experiencing the racial environment, particularly the racial, the workplace environment. My participants are kind of falling into two categories, right. So there is this one category you have folks are like, Oh, you doing study about race last workplaces, or Black people? Oh, let me tell you what's going on at such and such and such and such and such and such, right. The other category of folks that I'm experiencing are like, there is a desire to talk about what's going on. But there's also a reticence and also a kind of fear, potentially wish or shyness is the wrong word, but there's kind of like this negotiation, too, figure out, like, is it a safe place to talk about these things. The other thing I'm finding is like, prior to me opening up the space, a lot of my participants have said, like, this is the first time they've been able to talk about these things. And I think that's telling, I think, you know, not often are Black people afforded the time and space to really talk about their racialized workplace experiences. And, you know, much participants kept saying how appreciative they've been of this. It's kind of in some ways therapeutic for them. I think those things are telling.

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Dr. Thomas 06:19

So follow up question to that... have you noticed anyone that may have had a really positive experience, um, who may be feeling-- Maybe just like a little bit guilty about having a good experience when they know their counterparts aren't or maybe wanting to hold back on how great their experience is? Because they know what it is for their counterparts?

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Dr. Fowles 06:48

I think that's interesting. Yeah. That might have to do with some saliency issues, too, right. Yeah, yeah. If Blackness is your most salient identity, then you going to feel things a different type of way versus someone that thinks everything is great. And, but Blackness might not be their most salient identity.

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Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III 07:11

I love both of those questions. I was talking to a participant the other day, and they kept bringing up how the form of racial mistreatment that they were experiencing was more passive aggressive, like that was a clear theme, like microaggressions. Right, right. And then there was another interview that I had, when for the most part this, I experienced that this participants interview as like, mostly positive, but there was almost a sense in which they were almost they kind of held back, it seemed to me in terms of like, telling me like the bad stuff.



Dr. Thomas 07:51

But I think that there are examples of departments, maybe managers that just do a great job at allyship or just camaraderie, I guess if they're also Black, right, and they make positive workspaces for their Black staff on college campuses. I think that there are some of those examples. So I'm just-- I was just curious.



Dr. Fowles 08:19

Dr. Jaqui's curiosity around positive workplace experiences for Black staff and administrators led to a tangential conversation about Black excellence, building networks, and navigating higher education. It's here where we pick up the conversation.



Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III 08:36

I think that there are ways to navigate this industry. I think it does. Note, we know that there are systemic barriers, that there are structural barriers. These are real things. But those barriers have never not existed, right for one. And two, this goes back to the research I'm doing. There's always been a savviness about us, that figured out how to how to be successful. Right. So I, yeah, I want to champion that.



Dr. Fowles 09:08

So tell us about the networks that you've tried to build, and then how you contribute to them as you progress throughout your journey.



Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III 09:16

Oh for me, I do think back to my time at Hampton, you know, just having a network of Black people who are committed to the excellence and success of other Black people is helpful. Because I mean, I think successful Black people isn't a zero sum game. Meaning your your success as a Black person doesn't take away from my success as a Black person and embracing that has been helpful, as I've curated, and just really been engaged in networks. And I think really, Hampton was a space to kind of like come to that understanding. So my Hampton network might and broader HBCU networks. I've been able to plug in and tap into that. My fraternity network Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Incorporated. My fraternal network has been incredibly helpful getting jobs and providing insight here. My faith network, you know, they, my faith network has provided incredible you know, social support. Yeah being Black you know, Black people networking with Black people has been helpful for me. Both is kind of like a respite, but also kind of like a source

of inspiration, creativity, a source. So it's so rich, you know, being Black is so rich. That's-- That's another podcast for another day.

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Dr. Fowles 10:51

It's interesting that Dr. Christian ended our conversation focused on finding resources but also a sense of respite in his network. It is this sense of self care that sparked the research of the second guest in this episode. After Toni Jeannine Harris, has been an urban school educator for grades 6 through 12 for 15 years. She is a native of South Central Los Angeles, and has a true passion for improving education for Black and Latinx students. As a first generation college student, she recently completed her doctorate in educational leadership in the University of Southern California, and holds her bachelor's and master's degrees from Stanford University. Now, take a listen to our conversation with Dr. Toni.

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Dr. Toni Jeanine Harris 11:39

So my dissertation is on teacher self care, and preventing teacher burnout and attempting to increase teacher well being. I think that is a pretty relevant topic, even right now, in today's climate. I became interested in this topic, because of my own situation, my own experiences, my own testimony, that I feel very blessed to be able to share today with you. And to be more clear, I was I was experiencing burnout symptoms. Those where, you know, I was feeling like I was having a lot of mental health issues, I wasn't feeling like myself in the classroom. I wasn't feeling like myself in my studies, I was really struggling with some issues around self care, maintaining the rigor of both my program and my job. And so I really want to shout out that particular Professor right now, too, because if it weren't for her giving me that space to research teacher burnout, I'm not sure really where I would be at this time. My research for my dissertation really started with me focusing within and my testimony helped me to continue to research what, what teachers need.

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Dr. Fowles 13:10

It's interesting that now in these times, when students are learning at home, right, and they're learning in different ways. A lot of people are just now thinking about what the teacher experiences, right? And that that's really important. The idea of burnout for a person that is around, you know, 30 individuals that are going through a development processes, and what does that development look like for the person that's supposed to be leading the way? So tell us a little bit more about your findings. Right? What did you find through your research? And then more importantly, what do you want people to do? Based on on what you found?

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Dr. Toni Jeanine Harris 13:58

Well, we have to go and say it'd be the forthright in saying that teaching is one of the most demanding professions in our society. I really even during this, this climate is pandemic, the working from home, the homeschooling all the things that are going on, I really want everyone to understand that teaching-- how important teachers are, have and and really the work the amount of work that they do, and the amount of of heart and soul they put in to their students. I think the reason why I may have been experiencing something related to burnout at that time, was because I've always categorized myself as a you know, as someone who's like a-- And listen to the word Die Hard educator, it was just within that phrase, the word die is like, it's like this idea that we are going to grind.

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Dr. Fowles 15:13

If someone is experiencing that burnout, what are some ways that you think that they can navigate those spaces?

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Dr. Toni Jeanine Harris 15:21

Right? The first thing that comes to mind is setting boundaries. What do I need today, to be able to get my work done, but to also function at my fullest potential. Something that I realized is that I was often the only Black female teacher in certain spaces. And sometimes that really motivated me to be all that I could be, especially for my Black students, because I really believed in in that they needed the representation. But then with that said, I also want to represent myself as a healthy and happy human being. And if I'm not representing myself in that way, then what is that telling my students, so it's a, it's a constant reflective cycle. So there was a school that I was working, where I was working, and I was, I was the Spanish teacher, I was the dance teacher, I was the cheerleading coach, I was the leadership advisor. And I realized that at a certain point, it just was not healthy for me anymore to maintain that being on all time at all times. And to be a teacher, many people feel as though you have to be on at all times. So my research is focusing on trying to figure out how we can prevent the burnout, which is the, the the anxiety, the the not able to focus, the overwhelming feelings, all of these things. Like the cynicism, the just being feeling like detached or not able to handle everything that's being thrown at them. And that's not necessarily a healthy state to be in. We talk a lot in education about how we can develop social emotional development or social emotional skills for our students. But we often miss where we need to talk more about how we can make sure our teachers are okay, and are healthy and socially emotionally capable to deal with the profession.

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Dr. Thomas 17:40

So thank you for that. Right. I just, it's really important for teachers to be very aware of what the job entails so that they can fully prepare themselves mentally, physically, spiritually-- all of that. Right. Right. And I'm wondering if you have any thoughts, whether from your research or just from your expertise, from your experience, on what is it that maybe administrators can be doing right, because there's assistant principals and their principals and, you know, beyond? I don't know exactly how K through 12 hierarchy goes beyond that. But, you know, there's, there's all of these people who can who can support teachers in that self care and preventing that burnout and finding those balances. Do you have any thoughts about what they can be doing?

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Dr. Toni Jeanine Harris 18:30

Yes, well, my first thought is that our administrators do need to remember where they came from. They need to remember what it's like to be in the classroom on a day to day basis. Sometimes, through that particular job of administration, you can be sometimes removed from the groundwork of being in the classroom day to day. And I think some of the best administrators are those that that remember what it's like to be a teacher and often have that-- take that perspective, when they are assisting and supporting their teachers. I also think it's important for administrators to give teachers that space to set boundaries, to have to be able to set-- to have those conversations around, you know, what the demands are of this job?

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Dr. Thomas 19:29

Yeah, I just want to add that I think that's absolutely correct. I think it is important that teachers do have some type of way to communicate with administrators on what is really happening at that ground level, what's really happening in the classroom. And I also suspect that based on my experience with different organizations, just in general that-- I suspect that administrators can do even more. Then, you know, just listening, I suspect they can do even more than giving teachers space to draw those boundaries. So I think that administrators can really go to the forefront to try to model what healthy boundaries are for them, you know, that they have for themselves, and demonstrate that to the teachers and say, it's okay to go home when your work hours are done. Then I defer to both of you, as you've both worked in K through 12. But I think that there are things that they can do.

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Dr. Toni Jeanine Harris 20:40

I think that we need to work on rapport between administrators and teachers. I mean, it's just being able to establish the rapport from the beginning that you feel comfortable to even say, Hey, this is what's going on in my life today, or whatever it is. It has to be that that space has to be there.

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Dr. Thomas 21:01

So I want to pivot a little bit, you know, you your class of 2020, congratulations again. Right. And you've been an educator for 15 years. What is next, you're all done, you have this research done, you have this doctorate ready to go. What's next?

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Dr. Toni Jeanine Harris 21:22

With my research, I was able to design a curriculum for teachers self care to incorporate teacher self care into teacher education. I'm very big on teacher education, I want to be able to share my story, I want to be able to help the future. The incoming teachers, the the teachers, who are, you know, those that are thinking about becoming a teacher, especially in in this climate, everything I want to be able to impart my knowledge on to those that are coming after me.

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Dr. Fowles 21:54

I think that we hit the nail on the head on a lot of issues. Yeah, I think that the experiences that you share have-- can be reflected in a lot of other people's stories as well. So I'm hoping that people realize that this is not a singular incident. That is a thing that is proven by research. And it is that idea that the voices of higher education professionals have become siloed at all levels, as coping mechanisms to racialized experiences, and often as an outcome of poor self care that brings these two thought leaders together. As education becomes an increasingly virtual experience, these social dynamics will become increasingly overshadowed by the technical logistics of how education happens. Through the research of Dr. Wilmon A. Christian, III and Dr. Toni Jeanine Harris, you can take actionable steps to address these complex issues. We hope you enjoy today's show. Remember, the way we build social capital is to build self and build others. We're sure you've got some notes, I got a tablet, computer or even using a pen and paper. Leave us review, continue the conversation on social media @BlackSocialCap , and share the show with someone you know. Until the next episode, stay motivated and rise together.

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Dr. Thomas 23:15

This is Black Social Capital.

