

# Dr SyLinda \_ Final

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS


people, black, students, research, sy, community college, community, faculty, belonging, teaching, growth mindset, grad school, learned, practices, feel, folks, job, person, classroom, little bit


## SPEAKERS


Dr. Thomas, SyLinda Musaindapo, Dr. Fowles


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- D** Dr. Fowles 00:00  
Are you tired of bland, Eurocentric fashion accessories? Do you want to feel seen when you step out?
  - D** Dr. Thomas 00:05  
Well then Huey's Sons is the brand for you. Huey's Sons is a pro-Black accessories company that focuses on Millennial style and Afrocentric values. They have a variety of products like lapel pins, buttons, hats, Apple watch bands and more. I bought some stickers and put them on my laptop and I also have a few pins and the quality of everything is great. You will definitely find something for yourself and all your friends and family. Check out HueysSons.com for the latest drop today.
  - D** Dr. Fowles 00:39  
That's hueyssons.com
  - D** Dr. Thomas 00:54  
Black Social Capital. Today's guest is Dr. Sylinda Musaindapo. She goes by Dr. Sy. Dr. Sy grew up in the Chicago area and is a first generation college graduate. She began her professional journey in nonprofit public health education, and then she taught middle


school for three years. After that Dr. Sy taught developmental education courses for underprepared undergraduate students. While she was working on her master's degree in adult and higher education at Northern Illinois University. She continued and got her doctorate in adult and higher education. And she currently works as a higher ed practitioner, including her current work as a faculty coach for two major universities online graduate programs through 2u Incorporated. She serves in multiple roles, including faculty member, student organization advisor, student retention expert, active church member and active community member who leads grassroots initiatives for inclusion and human rights. Welcome, Dr. Sy.


 SyLinda Musaindapo 02:02  
Thank you. Great to be here.

 Dr. Fowles 02:05  
Now, you know all that bio is great and dandy. Let me tell you why. I'm excited that Dr. Sy is here. Because literally, you know, today, this is the first time we've spoken in years on yours. I think the last time we saw each other was at the high school cafeteria tables. Yeah, well, what are what are futures held? We barely understood that we got into college.

 SyLinda Musaindapo 02:37  
Right? Yeah.

 Dr. Fowles 02:40  
And now we're both sitting at the table with Doctorates. So I'm just trying to figure out how all that happened. And I think that's, that's why we're here today.

 SyLinda Musaindapo 02:49  
Yeah. Super excited to be here. I've been looking forward to this.

 Dr. Thomas 02:56  
Awesome, well we're super glad to have you. So we're gonna 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. And today we're going to hear about

your research. So first question, what is the topic of your research and how did you become interested in it?



SyLinda Musaindapo 03:23

So my research focused on- I explored how African American community solid college students perceived belonging and I became interested in that-- it's really a personal reason why I became interested so when I graduated from high school like Dr. Theo just said, like I I didn't know what college was, I didn't really know what I was getting into. I had a very safe social circle in high school. I feel like I was really blessed to be able to be around a lot of strong intellectual, creative, high achieving Black kids. And so when I got accepted into an unnamed, prestigious PWI, I was like, okay, whatever, it will just continue, like, I've always been good at school. And then I got there. And I was really disoriented by the, the the social aspect of it, like I had, I knew how to interact in circles with people who weren't Black, but I had not faced institutional or it had not realized that I had faced institutional racism the way that I did once I got to that school and so I was there on an academic scholarship. I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I was like, winning like Yeah, that should be fine. School. I've always been good at school, but I ended up leaving that university because of the the emotional and sociological relationships that I was like having trouble connecting. And I transferred to another PWI, but at that PWI wanted higher concentration of Black folk, but I also knew people there. And so I learned firsthand that you Not having a sense of belonging on a campus could impact attrition. Like I never imagined that I would not complete undergrad in a traditional four years at the school that I started at. So that's when my interest kind of started. But at that point, I still didn't know that I could actually have a career in higher education. So I was still thinking like, I'm an educator. So I continued going, you know, the route of being prepared to teach K-12. And in the back of my mind, I was always still kind of thinking like, how can I help other people who are like me, who didn't know what we were getting into when we went to college. And so after I taught Middle School for three years, and then after that, when I went back to get my master's degree in adult and higher education, that's when I really became interested in looking at student attrition, looking at retention practices, why people leave school in the first place, and specifically why African Americans leave school. And then from there, I started working at a community college, and I just fell in love with the mission all around of community colleges, and the role that they play in the community, the roles they play, to give people access to school that didn't have it before. So all of that kind of joined together. So my own personal experience, you know, understanding that belonging, like impacted my own attrition and my own ability to complete but then also wanting to, like help other people. And then once I really started to understand the mission of the community college, I had to. It just seemed like the perfect match. Like I had to look at how African American students that community

college were perceiving belonging, because we knew, like from jump that, that a lot of those students were not completing, or successfully transferring.

D

Dr. Fowles 06:47

Makes sense, I feel like, your story is really similar to a lot of folks we talked to, it's, it's really, and I think it, uh, there's something about, you know, the Black experience, trying to make sure that the next person, you know, doesn't fall for the okey doke.

S

SyLinda Musaindapo 07:05

I think that resilience is people like we were just, we're just, we're such a strong and like resilient people, we're gonna find a way to, like, get out of any complicated situation we're in and to prevent other people from going into it. But that's dope to hear that, you know, you had similar ended up having a similar journey.

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Dr. Fowles 07:28

Can you tell tell us a little bit about, you know, your research process? And also tell us what you found from your research and what you want people to do with your findings?

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SyLinda Musaindapo 07:43

Yes, so I'll kind of start, I'll go backwards. So what I want people to do. I want people to, specifically for education practitioners, that was my target audience, and we learn a lot of theory, we are really good at creating acronyms and researching and studying patterns and behaviors of people. But what we have not been good at, is considering intentionally researching marginalized populations. And we also haven't been good as, as an overall higher education institution, we have not done a good job of making sure that our practices aren't perpetuating institutionalized racism, and racist things that were established intentionally for the progression of white men and to exclude everyone else. So what I want us to do is to be thoughtful, and to be intentional about equity, and to be intentional about our practices in student development and student affairs. And specifically, consider you know, how the decisions we're making are impacting African American students. So that's what I want us to do. But to back up, my research is grounded in critical theory, because kind of what I just said, because, you know, I learned all the theories that, you know, through in my general higher education classes, and it became apparent very early that these theories and these practices were grounded in were grounded in a system that wasn't built for Black folks, and it wasn't built for people like me. And so for that reason, I approached the research process through the lens of

Critical Race Theory, because I wanted to make sure that every aspect of my research I was looking at it from how we could transform the relationship, like between race and power and racism and power in American culture on campus. So I started off I want also realized fairly early on that I was really interested in connecting connecting with people's stories. And so the qualitative route for those of you who haven't gotten that far yet in your in your educational career, quantitative is more so when you're looking at like, the numbers and like statistical data, and then qualitative, often takes that foundation of the statistical data, statistical data and explores the, the, the aspects of, of a research that you can't really grasp with just numbers and graphs and stuff.

**D** Dr. Thomas 10:19  
Like the why and the story, right?

**S** SyLinda Musaindapo 10:21  
Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Help me out.

**D** Dr. Thomas 10:25  
I mean, I'm team I'm quantitative, but I love y'all, but it's all about the stats.

**S** SyLinda Musaindapo 10:34  
Honestly, I live in both worlds like I-- we can't do one without the other, and neither one will tell the whole story. So as I started to go into my topic, though, I realized that there's enough, there's so much quantitative evidence that Black people are being underserved in community colleges, and that we're, you know, we're not persisting. And so I really wanted to get into the stories and understand how belonging was impacting that. And I felt the best route was to go through narrative inquiry. And so I went through with a qualitative route and wanted to really hear stories. I mean, that was really my main, my main goal in my research was to just listen, and to accurately tell the stories of the people who were gracious enough to share vulnerable and personal experiences that they had with the community college and within their community and in their families. So I same thing, though, when I started diving into narrative inquiry. I'm like, this isn't us. And so I ended up going through going through critical narrative inquiry, which highlighted the counter narratives of the students. So not just the mainstream narratives that we hear, but I want it to, to hear those counter narratives of, of my participants.

- D** Dr. Fowles 11:48  
So let me ask you this. You mentioned part of your research, you just wanted to listen. How many how many folks that that you interviewed mentioned something to the effect of, you know, this is the first time I've been listened to. But this is the first time I've been telling my story, right?
- S** SyLinda Musaindapo 12:09  
Every single one of them said, this was the first time that they felt that it was the first time someone asked. Yeah.
- D** Dr. Fowles 12:18  
And. That's telling me, you know, a lot of times we're doing these things, and we're experiencing this stuff. And we feel like we're out here all alone. And I nobody ever asked nobody more, either nobody asked or the people around us might not understand. Right? So we haven't said anything. Right? Yeah. Here comes as researcher.
- D** Dr. Thomas 12:44  
That that looks like you.
- S** SyLinda Musaindapo 12:47  
Right? Exactly. That was a big part. That was a, honestly, in most of my most of my interviews, though, you just highlighted two things that came up. And in all of them, everyone said, this is the first time I'm talking about this with another person, like no one has ever asked. And then also, almost everyone highlighted how important it was for them. Not only that, I was a researcher that looks like them. But my husband was born in Zimbabwe. And so I was also interviewing, I ended up interviewing a few people who are African American in the sense that they're like, first generation Americans, or first and second generation. And so also they appreciate it, being able to connect with someone who understood kind of a little bit of a differences and the dissonance that happens sometimes on campuses between Blacks, folks who came, you know, 400 years ago or, you know, through slavery, and then Black folks who immigrated here more recently.
- D** Dr. Fowles 13:44  
It's so amazing. I like, no matter where we go, there's gonna be some similarities. And like,

that happened to you, too. But that wasn't just an individual incident. Right? Oh.

D

Dr. Thomas 14:02

And they will have you thinking you're crazy. It is gaslighting.

S

SyLinda Musaindapo 14:08

For real. And that was a big part of why I chose belonging in the first place, too, is because just even in practice, like even in my first like, on campus community college job, I realized right away that everybody thought they were going through things by themselves, like, people, they didn't realize that they were having the same struggles as the person sitting in class right next to them. You know,

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Dr. Thomas 14:34

I've been thinking about exactly what you said, when you said like, this is what I want people to do with this research. I mean, really, we just want people to use it. Right, please. It's, we just, I don't know how many more of these studies we need to do for college administrators to go oh, let's go ahead and fix this. Because there's so many brilliant researchers. So many Brilliant, um, you know, articles, and they all have like, this is what I want you to do with this research at the end and still generate generation, right generation after generation of, you know, Black college student is experiencing the same thing and it's probably going to take So, so many of us to be in positions of power for us to be able to just use the research, because we're super smart, right? Obviously, so many people do this research, right? It's not just the Black community. Yeah, and we're all coming up with the same thing. So yes, if you are a college administrator...

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Dr. Fowles 15:42

I don't want them just to use the research, I want them to cite me.

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Dr. Thomas 15:50

Right.

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SyLinda Musaindapo 15:51

And they will. They're going to cite us they're gonna see they're gonna cite us, but will will will raise up it will raise up a generation of, of educators and practitioners who will will

keep the legacy going. But it is also an opportunity for us to like be intentional about rebuilding our communities, and bringing the capital both the social, intellectual, financial, all of that capital back into back into our communities.

D

Dr. Fowles 16:18

I totally agree.

D

Dr. Thomas 16:19

So that's the end of the intellectual capital segment for today. We're going to go ahead and take a quick break.

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Dr. Fowles 16:26

Have you ever felt the need to let people know who you are and who you are not in a professional setting? Well now you can with a Critical Race Theorists or a Culturally Relevant Pedagogist Tee. Get your swag and stay motivated by going to [staymotivatedandrisetogether.com/shop](https://staymotivatedandrisetogether.com/shop)

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Dr. Thomas 16:47

All right, we're back.

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Dr. Fowles 16:48

So our Community Capital Segment is a discussion about a Black professional's journey, you know, best practices, lessons that you've learned. So I really want to take this time to dig deep into more about your pathway in terms of we talked a little bit about you know, your start in school, you know, how you chose your institutions and a little bit of that process, but talk about how you selected your major and, and tell us tell us that in terms of your thought processes going from you know, undergrad degree to ending up with a doctorate. What were those processes like?

S

SyLinda Musaindapo 17:34

Nonlinear for sure. Um, you know, when I was coaching students actively one of the first thing grad students-- one of the first things I would say is that grad school does not respect I'm sorry that life does not respect grad schools what I used to say all the time. Like my first semester, my first semester so let me back up a little bit -- career paths so



fresh out of undergrad I worked in community public health education for a little bit while I waited to get my first teaching job. And so then I got a job teaching at a predominantly white Christians K-12 School in a rural city in Illinois, and I was a Christian school--conservative Christian school, I was the first Black academic teacher they had hired ever they have an open 35 years full time. They had like, you know, hired, hired us for to do other things, but not to primarily teach. And so I'm taught there for three years, but I'm saying all this to build up to a point to how I transitioned into grad school in 2009. I, I somehow injured my neck, I don't know how I fractured my neck. And so I ended up getting, like having to leave the job that I was at, and that forced me to go back into grad school. So, um, from there, I was like, What am I going to do? And that's when I really started to discover that I could actually like, make a career out of higher ed. So when I transitioned there, I started teaching like at the university level, and I fell. I just fell in love with the students. I fell in love with the process and I saw so much opportunity and so much, so much impact that I could make already. So it just opened my eyes to a whole new world. I started teaching developmental reading, developmental writing, developmental study skills, and I just hustled from there like, while I was getting my master's, I was teaching at the university I would drive down the street teach at the community college, I was playing guitar on the weekends for money. I was taking pictures, I was a photographer I started a business.

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Dr. Thomas 19:48

You had five jobs

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SyLinda Musaindapo 19:49

Like this has to work and then in the middle of that y'all my house got struck by lightning burned down. So like in the middle semester of grad school, my house got struck by lightning, I had just built the house the year before now, got struck by lightning, burned down, lost everything. Um, but I was like, all I have, right, it was a blessing for me because all I legit had was my education. And I was in the first class or my grad program. And the class I was taking, I had to take in order to teach that fall. So like, and my boss was teaching it, like, there was just no, I felt like I didn't have any room to not be successful. And so this kind of goes back to what we were talking about earlier, with just the resilience that we have, like, I, I had to use that, that experience to like, I use that experience to drive me towards the one thing that couldn't burn down. I couldn't The one thing that my health couldn't impact and I was my intellectual capital, you know, it was it really drove, it really drove my passion. Despite the racism, despite the the microaggressions, despite the physical challenges I was having, despite the fact that I didn't have a toothbrush or shoes, because our house burned down. Like I had what I had in my, in my mind, and I had the

social and intellectual capital that I had to, to move forward and to be successful. And ultimately, that drove me I mean, the reason I ended up getting my doctorate while I was in the master's program, I was standing, I was at Moody, I was taking one of the classes at the satellite, at Moody in downtown Chicago. And I'm standing in the window and my, with my professor, he's like on a break guy from Chile. And we're looking out the window and he's like, you need to get a doctorate and I'm like, Nah, this is good. He's like, no, like, we need your voice, we need that the things that you contribute in this class, like we need your voice in the field. And that one person kind of gave me the courage to be like, All right, I'll apply and see what happens, you know. Um, yeah. So that's how I that's how I ended up continuing the journey.

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Dr. Fowles 21:55

My one or two folks that make that light bulb come on.

S

SyLinda Musaindapo 22:01

I just need one person is respected to tell me I could do it. So I'm a Faculty Relationship Manager for a company education technology company called 2u and what to you does it partners with graduate programs, like universities around the world, and helps them bring their graduate programs online so that more students have access to those programs. And so that includes a variety of wraparound services like admissions and marketing all the way through. And so I'm in a little on the faculty success niche. And so my role is to work with faculty one on one. And I help them I help coach them into best practices for bringing either some for some of them, this is the first teaching jobs. So just like basic strategies for teaching and engaging students and all of that, but then also, for those who've been teachin. I also work with a lot of people who employ attorneys, and CEOs who've been doing their job for forever and been teaching in a classroom forever. But this whole teaching online thing is like, odd and intimidating for some people. So I hope I'm help kind of coach them on the best way to keep their classes engaging and to help use the technology to interact with their students in a meaningful way. Sometimes more meaningful ways than they do on campus. But the most fulfilling part of my job-- while that's fulfilling it's actually the side hustle part of my job. So I'm very involved in diversity, equity and inclusion. For for the company as well. I'm the co chair for the Black Engagement Network for our Denver office, we have offices kind of spread out around the world. And it's especially right now we've been getting an increase in faculty asking for how, how do they know that their classroom is being inclusive? How do they know that their teaching practices are equitable? How do they How do they deal with, you know if one student is makes a racist remark? Or is being micro aggressive toward another student?

D Dr. Thomas 24:20  
Mm hmm. Yes

S SyLinda Musaindapo 24:21  
They won't know how to deal with this. And so the most fulfilling part of my job right now is we're working on developing a teaching certification that's focused on equity and inclusion for higher ed faculty. And that'll be an online series we're working on you know, I've been we've been doing this kind of on the low like on the side all around. But now, because of the social climate that we're in and with the Black Lives Matter movement has given so much fuel. So now, we've also been doing nothing I've been doing internal training for the other people who work with faculty and we're aligning with the folks who work with students as well to you know, establish a clear frame work that we're presenting across the board, for preparing the students to be in an equitable and diverse classroom and to learn, but also, you know, helping faculty do things like analyze your syllabus. What articles are you using? What can you do to make your classroom more inclusive, those sorts of things. So that's actually the most fulfilling part of my job, even though, technically, it's only about 3% of it. And then when I think about what's next, I, I have a lot of ways I can go, I definitely want to get back in the classroom, I took a break from teaching, to wrap up my doctoral research and then grow, I grew human. So I'm like, now I'm like, Okay, it's time to get back in the classroom. So looking to get back in the classroom for sure that, you know, on, in addition to the role I'm doing, and then ultimately, I'm still working towards a goal of being a vice president Student Services.

D Dr. Thomas 25:55  
Yeah.

D Dr. Fowles 25:57  
Come on VP.

S SyLinda Musaindapo 26:01  
Then there will be no excuses for, for not having inclusive practices, and not really being intentional about how we're serving students. Mm hmm.

D Dr. Fowles 26:11

You just said something that made Jaqui smile. Dismantle the system from the inside.

**D** Dr. Thomas 26:17  
Yup.

**S** SyLinda Musaindapo 26:21  
I can't say we have to, but I personally feel called to do so. And I feel like I have a grace to, to help shift people's mindsets in a way that's also safe, it's disorienting, but it's also safe. And I want to use that.

**D** Dr. Thomas 26:39  
I'm gonna switch gears just a little bit. So you know, we often have that one person that inspires our work that we look up to, that has maybe helped us along the way. Um, do you want a shout out? Uh, you know, is there one professional as you you know, approach a career where you're able to use your research and others research on equity and inclusion, right? Is there one person who you would like to shout out?

**S** SyLinda Musaindapo 27:07  
That's hard. I don't like this question ever. Because I am such a product of my community. I dedicated my dissertation to Chicago, and I said, like, this is for Chicago, but because you believed in me, I believed in me, and like I am, I just I was raised by a community of people. Like I have many mothers and have many fathers, like, of course, like, shout out to my biological parents, but even my biological parents, like gave me bonus parents. And so and then, the Black church plays such a major role in my development and continues to, like I learned, I learned how to be-- so maybe, let's say, the Black church this time instead of Chicago, like, because I learned creative expressions. I learned public speaking, I learned how to articulate my thoughts, I learned how to interact with difficult people I learned. I learned what it was like to suffer along side somebody who was dealing with addictions, or you know, who had to forgive and love somebody who stole from you in your face. Like, there's just so much I learned from, from the Black church, and my passion and drive for the next generation and for the community pain from the community of folks that raised me, I mean, even I even learned how to drive from my youth leaders, like, so much of my life, my first job came from, from a relationship with the church. So so much of my life. I'm proud of the community, I am the result of what it takes what happens we have a village raise a child. So I'll shout out Chicago, always, and I shout to the Black church this time, too.

D

Dr. Thomas 28:53

So are there any professional or social orgs that you've been a part of, that have helped you-- that have helped you professionally allowed you to connect with the community, allowed you to give back to the community, in addition to you know, the community in Chicago and your Black church.

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SyLinda Musaindapo 29:14

Also, I'm a member of Elogeme Adolphi Christian sorority, so still active with that, as well. Of course, I mentioned the Black Engagement Network for 2u, which is a global network. So we collaborate, you know, with our counterparts in Cape Town, and across the US. NASPA and you know, the general Student Affairs I haven't been as involved in those recently, but they definitely played a big role-- Black Graduate Students Association. those organizations played a big role in my initial networking and building my my first kind of group of professional, professional peers.

D

Dr. Thomas 29:54

And I think it's important to note right like for, especially for our listeners, who are thinking about grad school or currently in grad school, right, you can get involved with things that are on campus, there are national orgs that have Graduate School-- graduate student specific things. You can find things at your church, right? Like you can find community, wherever you are, to give you all of the you know, all of the support, the skills, the whatever you need, sometimes you just need to see somebody that looks like you, and like, hang out for a little bit, right? Like that is priceless at times. Because grad school is lonely.

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SyLinda Musaindapo 30:34

It is Oh, one big thing the deltas here in Denver. They did a conference for educators. And it was because of that conference, I attended that conference because I attended that conference that I met. Um, the link that will lead to my first group of participants were my research study. So I definitely have to shout them out here too. Because had they not, you know, set that stage, I don't know, who knows, I might still be struggling to find participants. Still trying to figure it out. So yeah, that was that was so that was huge. Because at that conference, I didn't know anybody. I'm like, Hi, I'm Black. You're Black. Can anybody talk to me? And I ended up really making some some strong connections there. So yeah, I got a shot the deltas out to the Denver Deltas specifically.

D Dr. Thomas 31:22  
Okay, Denver chapter Delta Sigma Theta sorority?

S SyLinda Musaindapo 31:26  
That's right.

D Dr. Fowles 31:27  
I think I think the last little bit know in your bio, you talked about just having the the importance of having a growth mindset, right, touch a little bit on that.

S SyLinda Musaindapo 31:39  
For sure. So the opposite of a growth mindset is a fixed mindset. And that is, when we really get stuck. When we get stuck on what we believe in what we believe is true and aren't open to other perspectives. And it's, you know, anyone who's going to be a lifelong learner, and anyone who's going to be dedicated to continually growing as a human and as a person needs to have a growth mindset. I learned mostly about the growth mindset from navigating microaggressions in corporate in corporate America. So I'd say, especially right now, things are changing rapidly around us. Our society's changing, the rules are blurry. You know, people are afraid to talk but need to talk. And others are saying things that they've never said before. Because it's time for, for people to listen. So the thing I want to grasp onto as a person, and as a human is the the drive to continually evolve and the drive to continually open my mind up to perspectives that I hadn't previously considered. And I think it's important for all of us, and particularly Black folks, because we still live in a society where we, we do have to, you know, navigate, um, code switching and like, mainstream culture and in, you know, helping other folks understand who we are, regardless of whether or not we feel like we should have to, we have to right now, and so, and understand our experiences, and so it's not going to help anybody, if we're not modeling a growth mindset. While we're still at the same time asking our counterparts to have a growth mindset. So we need to have it so we can model it, but also, it's the only way that we're going to grow and progress as people is for all of us to continue to grow and, you know, try to look for opportunities to be better.

D Dr. Fowles 33:35  
Perfect.

- D** Dr. Thomas 33:36  
Yes. All right. So thank you so much, Dr. Sy for being on the show today. It has been a pleasure having you. I hope our listeners um, you know, definitely look you up and look out for you because you are going to do a lot of good in this world.
- S** SyLinda Musaindapo 33:58  
Yes, we are. We are we are Oh, you can if anybody's interested, you can find out all of the things that are happening with [www.drskylinda.com](http://www.drskylinda.com)
- D** Dr. Thomas 34:09  
And with that, that's a wrap. We're out.
- D** Dr. Fowles 34:15  
We hope you enjoyed today's show. Remember, the way we build social capital is to build self and build others. We're sure you got some notes on a tablet, computer, or even using a pen and paper. Leave us a review, continue the conversation on social media at @blacksocialcap, and share the show with someone you know. Until the next episode, stay motivated and rise together.
- D** Dr. Thomas 34:43  
This is Black Social Capital.