

**Christine Bramwell:**

Now, I'm more open to failure because I'm understanding that this is a part of my experience, and that I will never go up unless I go down. My change in understanding failure is knowing that my presence is more important than where I was and where I'm going.

*Music*

**JN Harrington:**

Hi, and welcome to Satelliser conversations; an audio series that seeds encounters and conversations between people coming at topics from different perspectives and orientations, many of whom have never met before.

The conversations are based on the lockdown online discursive rehearsal process of Satelliser: a dance for the gallery; a durational performance in which artists cooperate to maintain conversations whilst dancing over the course of a day as co-workers.

These conversations reflect intimacies across distances that many of us have experienced through the whole of the project.

I'm JN Harrington, a UK- based artist and leader of the Satelliser project across live shows, the podcast series, and an online publication: [satellising.com](http://satellising.com).

You can find more information about me by following @inside.i on Instagram or at [www.jnharrington.com/](http://www.jnharrington.com/).

Satelliser conversations are recorded and edited by Rohanne Udall at Siobhan Davies Studios with music composed by Jamie Forth and graphics created by John Philip Sage.

The Satelliser Project is produced by Zarina Rossheart and I.

*Music*

For this conversation, Satelliser co-worker Christine Bramwell invited King Ayenge and Amara Agili-Odion to talk with her about compassion, self compassion, potential, and failure across their educational experiences and their professional lives.

You'll hear from Christine, King, and Amara in a second. But before they get into it, I wanted to flag that we've put some resources in the show notes for anyone affected by any of the experiences discussed.

*Music*

**Christine Bramwell:**

Hello, I'm Christine. I'm a creative worker within my community, and you are about to listen to a conversation between me, Amara Agili-Odion, and King Ayenge.

We are talking about compassion, potential, and failure. Please be warned, this conversation can get tricky at times. So if there's something that feels too much to listen to, give it a pause, and come back later. Thanks.

**Amara Agili-Odion:**

Hi, I'm Amara. I'm a clinical psychologist assistant practitioner, bit of a mouthful. I have a youth work/support work/Youth Justice background.

I've been doing this for several years, and I completed my psychology degree as well, just like my fellows here. But on the side, I do acting in TV, theatre, performing arts: that's all me.

**King Ayenge:**

Hey, Christine, thank you. My name is King Ayenge. I'm an aspiring clinical psychologist.

I just graduated from my master's in mental health psychological therapies at Queen Mary's University. Prior to that, I completed my undergrad in Psychology with you both. I'm also an OCD advocate. And in my spare time, I like to sing; I like to dance; and I also like to cook.

**Christine:**

Yaay! We have such an amazing team to go through these topics. I must admit, that we have recorded this a million times. So, therefore, we're going to be really informal and free-flowing. It's going to be almost like joining us on a FaceTime, I hope. Because we are actually friends. I'm just disclaiming it now, so we don't have to have the pressure of holding onto formalities. OK?

[Crosstalk]

So let's just go through it. It would be great to start with Amara's study, and then we can lead into other things. But Amara, tell us about your amazing study around self compassion.

**Amara:**

So, in essence, we looked at the possible impact of self compassion on negative self behaviours -- so poor eating behaviours, poor eating habits -- following stress. So that's to say, would being self compassionate have a positive impact on somebody's behaviour in response to stress?

[00:05:07]

And we found that, actually, self compassion was important when a person had undergone stress and had experienced some sort of challenge or negativity that they needed to go through, and that's when self compassion became quite instrumental. But besides that, self compassion didn't really have a significance on general sort of behaviours across the board.

But it was very impactful when somebody was stressed.

**Christine:**

In the last recording that we did, we were talking a little bit around toxic positivity because I was mentioning how it's really hard to maintain that sort of discipline when you're feeling good to, I guess, amplify the moments when you're feeling bad. So I'm not going to start journaling now; I'm not going to start doing the affirmations now, because I'm feeling good.

But, when I'm down, that's kind of when I need it and I don't have the energy to actually start doing the journaling. So I wonder if there was something around -- is it beneficial to have that practice before going through a tough time?

**Amara:**

Yeah -- a 100. I think it kind of builds up character and resilience in the person so that when you are faced with like a whirlwind, a boomerang, those knock you outside your face kind of moments that really blow you off your feet -- you've got something there. You've got something in store that you can kind of whip out the bag.

And you're not blown away. So I think there's sort of -- and there's an element of sharpening the saw there when you have these positive behaviours and you practice mindfulness and gratitude and being good and kind to yourself as a way of life. I do get the toxic positivity thing, but I think that some habits are good to sustain and maintain, generally, just at least to build up your own sense of self, self-belief, character, your worth, and beyond.

**Christine:**

Yeah. Because you were mentioning before it was good to have that sort of practice. I can't remember directly what you were saying. It's like fine-tuning yourself. You said something really beautiful around -- it's just really nice to have that introspective moment around yourself. Because it's like a cherry on top of your day because you're basically saying, "What did I do today? How did I help myself?"

**Amara:**

I think I was saying that in this age that we're in now with social media, and there's a lot of toxicity out there and a lot of negativity out there that really challenges our sense of self and pushes us to unrealistic ideals of our image, our identity, our bodies, our thoughts even, really.

So having to navigate that -- it's best practice, in a way, to have a mechanism that can kind of sustain you throughout that because you don't know what you're going to come across at what point, at what time. And you want to kind of give yourself the best leverage against these kinds of experiences.

We know how comments and image and visuals and aesthetics can be, and sometimes they can really seep into our own perspectives and interpretations of the world. So, if you have something that will buffer that -- if it's just your 10, 20 minutes in the day that you're taking out to really kind of guard and guide yourself as to remind yourself who you are, what you have, why you're worth it, to whom you belong, then I think it gives you an advantage in these crazy times.

**Christine:**

In the crazy streets -- I agree. That whole guard and ground yourself -- did you say guard and ground?

**Amara:**

Guard and guide.

**Christine:**

Guard and guide. Guard and guide is important, but it's like guard and guide and ground: it's the three Gs.

**Amara:**

It's the three Gs.

**Christine:**

Yeah. That's what we need. We need that those things each day. I kind of wish there were more resources that we could run to.

So you were mentioning -- in the previous one, you didn't mention now in -- what the tools actually were. Because you said journaling. And then what else did you say?

**Amara:**

Yeah. Writing a love letter to yourself, having positive affirmations, practicing gratitude about yourself, your life, looking at things within, highlighting the beauty about oneself, writing a letter of forgiveness to oneself as well.

[00:10:15]

Stuff like that. These are all self compassionate exercises.

**Christine:**

Mmm. Sometimes the word self compassionate is like -- I don't really link those things to a lot of scripture, and the things that you said is very scripture-based. It's such an intimate thing to write to yourself each day to say like, "Wow, hon. You look so amazing, and I'm so proud of you." It's such an intimate experience to have with yourself.

And I kind of personally would use scripture as a, "Today was really tough". It's like, you know Eminem when he's like, "Sorry, mom" -- that's definitely writing something really angry. That's kind of how I use scripture, where it's just like super mad. But let's pass it onto Kingalicious because, King, maybe this is the perfect time to mention the sort of tools that you've found with your research.

**King:**

Yes. Thank you, Christine. That's very interesting, Amara, actually, because you talk a lot about techniques such as journaling, such as writing a love letter. That is very similar to my topic of research. I assess the effect of internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy in treating OCD. The golden standard for treating OCD -- obviously, OCD is a mental health disorder. I'm sure you have all heard of OCD.

And, in fact -- actually, when you guys think of OCD, what do you guys both think of?

**Christine:**

I think of repetitive movements. I think of repetitive movements, and I always -- for me, when I think of OCD, I think of light switches. But I think that's because in my head there's a visual for a film that I watched of somebody that had OCD and it was because --

**King:**

-- and was switching on -- yeah. Amara?

**Amara:**

I think because of my work, generally, I think it's -- I see it as something more restrictive. So it's not just about a repeated behaviour, but the amount of harm that it causes for the person to be able to live their lives daily. These are ritual behaviours that restrict capacity to do other stuff and kind of rule over their autonomy as well and mental wellbeing, as well as physical wellbeing.

**King:**

Yes. 100%. The reason I was asking is because I feel like that within media there's a perception of what OCD is, and there's much more to that than what is actually portrayed in media. OCD, as you know, constantly washing your hands, as you said, Christine -- flipping on the lights. But there's so much different aspects of OCD that people do not know of.

There's different types of OCD, for example, such as, harm OCD: people obsessing about harming others.

Sexuality OCD, where people obsess about sexuality concerns; relationship OCD, where there's people obsessed about phases around relationship. It's a lot more to what it's portrayed in media. And I feel like, within research there's starting to become an interest within OCD because it's an anxiety disorder that is increasingly been prevalent.

So my research was really centred around assessing whether internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy is more effective than face-to-face cognitive behavioural therapy, which, obviously -- cognitive behavioural therapy is a form of -- is the golden standard, actually, that -- the golden standard in which we treat OCD with. So if someone is dealing with OCD, they will be recommended to complete maybe 12 weeks of CBT.

So my research was kind of trying to see whether an internet-based CBT is more effective than face-to-face CBT because, at the moment, there is an increase in cases of OCD following the pandemic. Obviously, it makes sense. We've been told to wash our hands, to keep clean. This is going to obviously

spike fears and people who are dealing with OCD -- contamination OCD. So my research was focusing on that.

And again, CBT is just like -- it's a behavioural therapy, which involves a lot of techniques -- like Amara was saying -- to kind of help with this daily stresses, obviously. OCD itself impacting really take over someone's life and interfere with their being able to maintain their everyday activities. So there's lots of different techniques, like listing two positive things to counter one negative thing.

[00:15:15]

Or meditation, sitting down with the thought. Challenging yourself, confronting your fears, and journaling -- journaling your worries or journaling your thoughts -- record diary -- recording your thoughts in a diary: it's all techniques that help in treating OCD. And my research just looked at whether there's a difference in performing this therapy face-to-face and performing it virtually and how that affects the treatment of OCD.

**Christine:**

Sweet. Thank you. I think there's a lot of the -- from what you're saying is, both of the links are to do with scripture and some sort of -- I mean, your element was less to do with compassion. It was kind of more to do with the practical things. But I wonder if CBT has any sort of compassionate elements?

**King:**

Yes. Sorry, I actually -- I forgot to bring that in.

But I was going to say that there is a link to compassion in my topic in general with CBT and OCD because, obviously, when it comes to OCD, it's all about an individual's anxiety, an individual's fears that manifested in different forms such as contamination OCD, such as -- it's all based on their fears. It's all based on an anxiety that causes you to conduct rituals to lessen the fears.

And the best way of explaining it -- when it comes to compassion is -- just to give you an example. So, an individual, for example, that is fearing, is dealing with harm OCD, they deal with intrusive thoughts and obsessions about harming others and harming themselves, like maybe getting thoughts of stabbing their mum, for example, continuously. Even though they don't want to, they will continue to get those thoughts. So CBT comes in by just allowing that individual to understand that the thoughts are just thoughts.

And it's not real; it's just your mind going on. So in order to kind of lessen the thoughts, you have to allow yourself to allow it to happen -- allow the thoughts to happen; just let it flow. Compassion is very important in this because you have to recognise that you are not your thoughts; no matter how bad, how intrusive your thoughts may be, you need to have the compassion to understand that this is just your mind doing what your mind can do.

So compassion is very important because in -- in relation to OCD because you need to -- you really need to have that self compassion with yourself to realise that your thoughts are your thoughts, and they're not a representation of who you are.

**Christine:**

Period. It felt like maybe -- I'm not sure if we should have some sort of trigger warning? Because you went a little bit deep there. So it's a little bit of a late trigger warning, but it felt like you were getting a little bit triggered.

**King:**

Yeah.

**Christine:**

I guess I'm trying to find some sort of ways because you were both mentioning this sort of -- this scripture, self compassion, saying it's important to have self compassion. But I still, in some ways, don't understand what self compassion is because you are saying self compassion involves letting things flow. To understand that, in this moment, we cannot control what is happening. And that's like true presence. You can't control how you're thinking, how you're feeling in your environment, so you need to just go with it, and that's a part of self compassion.

But -- I don't know -- what would be the key things? If I had to create a self-compassion manual, what would that involve? How do we even define...

**King:**

Do you want to go Amara or...

For me -- OK. In relation to my research field, I would say self compassion is all about acceptance and understanding.

OCD is obviously a clinical issue that can really interfere with your everyday life and just make you think -- assume the worst about everything and just make you believe your fears and anxieties as reality. So, in relation to self compassion, I will say that it's just acceptance and understanding of the situation, understanding that this is a clinical issue that you can't -- essentially, you can't control your mind.

You can't control the thoughts that appear in your mind, the thoughts that occur. So the compassion comes in as in -- you just have to allow it: accept it and allow it to happen. Once you allow it, once you accept it, you understand that this is not true. It's just your fears; it's just your anxiety manifesting within your mind, causing you to do the rituals, causing you to have the obsessions. But once you understand that, it will lessen that fear, and you will be able to recover.

[00:20:29]

Not sure if that answers your question, Christine. But in relation to, obviously, my research topic and field, I would say self compassion is all about acceptance and understanding of the disorder.

**Amara:**

OK. For me, I think, I guess, I see self compassion in three ways: two that's based on my research and one as my own interpretation, right?

So, on the one hand, self compassion by one psychologist is the ability to be sensitive to one's suffering and try and alleviate it and prevent it within oneself and in other people. Yeah.

To another psychologist, self compassion is -- it's still about being sensitive suffering or negativity. But it's more about being non-judgmental about it and understanding that suffering is necessary, and it's universal to navigate human experience. And then I think, for me, self compassion is the ability to be able to love oneself unapologetically.

You don't need to look for a reason to be kind or loving to yourself, no matter how compassionate you can be with other people. The baseline, at the end of the day, is how compassionate can you be with yourself? You love to help other people. You love to be kind and do good to others and take care of others. Can you do that for yourself? Do you give yourself that same energy?

Do you give yourself that same love without having to try and find a reason for it or a basis as to justify why you're deserving of that love and that kindness and accepting yourself for who you are?

**Christine:**

That's very true. Because I was thinking -- what did you say -- something about suffering is a part of the human experience.

**Amara:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Christine:**

And that a little section on this -- I mean, it kind of leads us into understanding failure.

What is failure for us? My apologies: I've got this cat, and he's going crazy. Yeah. He's trying to join the conversation. But failure -- because what you're saying is suffering is part of our experience, and a big part of self compassion is understanding that because we are human, the human experience involves suffering. So then how do we navigate failure? How do we actually say -- I don't know -- we are all not good at these things.

And I guess it would be nice to talk about that with both of you because our experience was such an interesting one, where we came across a lot of positives but also a lot of negatives. So I don't know how at that time we dealt with failure, but what would be the difference between how we're dealing with failure now and how we dealt with it in the past?

**Amara:**

Interesting. I mean, Christine, for -- I think you should lead that one.

What was it really like for you in -- what were the differences in how you dealt with...



**Christine:**

Failure.

**Amara:**

What were the differences in how you dealt with...

**Christine:**

I think now -- yeah -- everyone needs to unmute their selves because let's have this conversation. Let's talk about failure.

When I'm thinking about failure sometimes, I know that, within myself, I have so much resistance for it. I hate the fact that I'd fail at something, and I hate the fact that I could be perceived in a negative way.

So I try to run away from failure a lot. But I end up failing a lot because I think I run away from it. And I think, at XXXX -- maybe we shouldn't be saying XXXX?

**Amara:**

At our university.

**Christine:**

At our university, our old university, I think I failed by not being able to ask for help. And I think I relied a lot on my friends in a way of trying to have the uni experience. But I really struggled to ask for help through the authorities, like through going to see a counsellor or just go into a teacher and say, "Look, I really needed help." Because I struggle to find my voice in asking for help.

[00:25:10]

And I'm not sure if that's to do with the frame of the university because it was really difficult to ask for help there because you kind of barely got to see a teacher. But I think now, within my current stage of life, I think I'm a lot -- I'm more open to failure because I think I'm understanding that this is a part of my experience, and that I will never go up unless I go down. I will never be able to progress unless I can move from a place.

And sometimes that place is not going to be the place that you want to head to. And I think that's the only way I can look at it because -- yeah. So I don't know. Maybe that doesn't answer anything. But I think my change in understanding failure is knowing that my presence is more important than where I was and where I'm going. And I have to harness my presence in order to go forward.

And by harnessing my presence, that means I need to ask for help. What was that too much jargon? What's harnessing my presence, man? I'm basically saying I know now I'm grounded -- I feel like I'm more grounded now, and I feel more confident in asking for help, whereas before, I was just like "help"? What the frick is that?

**King:**

I would just add onto that and just say, obviously, my experience at XXXX was very interesting.

In relation to failure, it's very interesting because in my journey of life -- self compassion, working on myself -- my philosophy and mindset about failure has really changed because I believe that failure does not exist until I give up. And, like Amara was saying, suffering is a part of life.

So mistakes are bound to happen. Until I give up, I haven't failed. In relation to my experience in that university that we don't say its name, even though we did say its name like five times before, I will just say that -- I guess this is part of the journey as well with OCD, and then we'll speak about this later on -- is failing to recognise a clinical issue.

I really believe that while in my experience at university I was dealing with anxiety and an onset of OCD that I did not understand. Had I gone and reached out for support -- this is my fault by the way -- maybe would have helped me in dealing with certain issues better because it's interesting. Because, obviously, I just completed my master's, and I feel like my experience was so much smoother than with the undergrad.

And you know that we'll say that the master's is more intense than the undergrad, but I felt like I flourished in an aspect compared to my undergrad. So, yeah. Yeah.

**Amara:**

I don't know. I don't really know, if I'm being honest, how I've navigated failure any differently if at all, to be honest.

And I think that's because I've always been a sort of -- that when I get to a certain point, I'm like an f-it, "it is what it is" kind of person, which I think is a form of self compassion in itself. I won't allow that thing to overwhelm me or subdue me. I think that probably -- that change probably came before the uni from hell as opposed to after.

And that's probably why I was able to kind of quickly see that, you know what? This isn't really conducive. I'm not really f-ing with this. I need to move on. I need to kind of step out of this toxic, evil space that we call uni. Yeah. And I think I started to celebrate -- during that time as well is when I really started celebrate things like small wins: handing in my assignments on time, getting help with statistics.

All of these little things that were so irrelevant to me before or inconsequential started to have meaning or value for me that -- "Oh, my gosh. We just stayed in that library for ten hours, even though we spent six hours of that sleeping." These are real life stuff we did guys. Real life stuff. We celebrated each other for that. We celebrated those little wins.

[00:30:10]

So when there were failures and stuff, it was kind of also easy to turn it and be like, "OK. But what about this angle?" And, actually, this means that you still get to proceed with the course or proceed with the

year or you can really -- now you know where you're not really strong -- just spin it somehow. So, yeah. If I'm being honest, I think that journey started probably before uni, that uni from hell, during the uni from hell and not necessarily afterwards.

**Christine:**

Maybe this is just an hour-long conversation around the uni from hell?

**Amara:**

Yeah. Maybe it's just a safe space -- a safe space.

**Christine:**

This has to be a safe space for us to talk about our -- the uni that shall not be named. Yeah. Because we really were napping for six hours in the library -- and, yeah.

**Amara:**

It really stressed us out and no amount of work --

[00:31:32]

**King:**

Guys, the question is, why were we napping? We were napping because we were overworked and burnt out.

**Christine:**

Period. Exactly. And I think we didn't notice it at that time because we actually -- we did a lot of library visits and a lot of that library visit was us sleeping in the nighttime, and then having one hour. And I have this distinct memory of napping and then waking up and then something happened. And King was like, "Oh, yeah. We should go home."

[00:32:00]

It does sound like we did an all-nighter, but it was half of the night.

**King:**

Yeah. I remember that.

**Christine:**

And in the mornings, I'd be like, "Yeah. I'm going to go home now." At two or three am -- I'm just going to go home.

**Amara:**

The security guards knew us, guys. They became part of our family -- the security guards.

**Christine:**

Yeah. I mean, I became a part of your family because you knew them and they were letting you in.

**Amara:**

Yeah. Yeah. Beyond my time at the uni from hell -- beyond my time at the uni from hell.

Listen --

**Christine:**

-- Yeah. I think it was like -- sorry to cut you Amara. What were you saying?

**Amara:**

No, no. I was just saying it was much. It was definitely a very overwhelming experience, emotionally and mentally draining. You could be half with -- I don't know what was it, like your module is changing -- all this bullshit -- sorry -- all this trash. It's just absolutely [indiscernible].

**Christine & King:**

Yeah.

**Amara:**

But you had to learn. I feel like self compassion was one of the mechanisms we survived; when we used to have our pep talk before exams; when we used to talk to each other -- "You know what, Amara? Actually, you've done all right. You've done enough work for today. Don't kill yourself." And we would embody those words, you know what I mean? We would absorb them. It's true. I've just done twenty hours no sleep. I can have a break.

Uni is actually just from hell. It's not me. It's not me. [laughter] Exactly what you were saying.

**King:**

And it's interesting is as well -- can I just add -- because like I was saying, I believe failure does not exist until we give up. We didn't give up. And it's interesting that when we all moved from that institution, we flourished, and we had better experiences. Because I feel like that's the key. I know, obviously -- OK.

I will say that -- because towards the end I did reach out for support, and it was interesting because the support was there. I won't deny. But the key is we were burnt out, and we were overworked. And when

we had looked at other institutions and at other things, that feeling wasn't there. That's important to consider.

**Amara:**

Yeah. And I think because we were kind able to notice that quicker, we were able to be more kind and merciful to ourselves as well.

I think one of those key moments that -- wow! This is -- it's not me; it's them or I'm actually -- I've actually done what I can was when we were deceived by that statistics lady. I can't remember her name. Thank God I can't remember.

**King:**

I know her name, but I'm not going to say it.

**Amara:**

Yeah. Don't say her name.

**Christine:**

No. We can't name and shame. No names.

**Amara:**

She deceived all of us that we had -- we had done all the appropriate stuff and met the -- we're going to meet criteria for the exam and boom! Boom! All the grades were -- I think we even tried to write or petition or something like that? Or the Student's Union was like -- we wanted our papers remarked. I think it was for that statistics paper. Am I right?

[00:35:03]

**King:**

No. People were petitioning because -- no.

They told us to focus on the part of the course for the exam. We go into the exam, we open the exam paper, the questions are completely different. So we were misled. We were misled.

**Amara:**

We were misled.

**King:**

And it was disastrous. To add on to what you're saying, Amara, I think for me --

**Amara:**

We exited that exam with pain.

**King:**

Mm-hmm. 100%. Do you know, I forgot what I was going to say so Christine, carry on.

**Christine:**

No. I was going to say a lot of what you said, Amara, when it came to having that self compassion to understand that. Sometimes it isn't you, it's something else, also involves the collective experience. So compassion has to be a part of the collective experience. It's not just something you can have with yourself. It has to be something that people can put into you as well. We need to be able to give each other those words of affirmation. So a little bit of compassion is saying we need to have a company.

If we didn't have each other, where would be? But the failure is the self, and it's also the frame. It's basically outside of you. I think the biggest part of also me trying to not do the blame game because I love saying, "Oh, yeah. I know. It cannot be me; it must be everything else. It cannot be me. I'm in this framework, and this framework is making me fail." But sometimes we actually are in a space where it's actually encouraging your failure because there is no -- you cannot survive within that --

**King:**

-- Yeah. Some of us obviously did not know about the support that was out there until the end. So that could have created an issue. I know, for example -- let me just give you an example -- I know that because with, obviously, anxiety OCD I can overthink and stress, which causes me to procrastinate and just because I become so overwhelmed by all of the anxiety and the stress, it stops me from working. And then I just leave everything last minute.

If I had maybe some support from a counsellor, from a therapist, that would help me ease that stress, it could have really helped my performance in that university. However, they do need to take accountability in the collective notion that we were overworked, and we were stressed.

**Christine:**

I don't think they care because that's almost like the school structure.

We could potentially have a conversation -- maybe there's a place here to talk about it, just around that sort -- mental health in academics. How do we deal with mental health in academics in general? A lot of us were battling with personal issues, things outside of -- things that were outside of us that we couldn't control, and we were still really expected to perform well because, if you weren't performing well, then that's our whole future on the line.

And that really -- especially if you're coming from a working-class background, and you need to work and also take part in uni, it isn't like good soil, basically. The university should be able to know these things. We should feel comfortable saying, "You know, I'm also working. Is there flexibility in this? Is there flexibility learning in this way?" So then we kind of -- yeah. I'm a little bit anti-school at the moment, but you know what I mean.

It's difficult for us to talk about mental health without talking about how academics actually impacted all of our mental health. People who went through the academic journey -- I don't know of anybody that felt absolutely sane. And maybe I only have crazy homies, but I don't know anyone that felt absolutely sane throughout their academic journey.

**King:**

I know people that felt sane, but -- they felt sane, but the way they went about things were not healthy.

Because there was something that was compromised, either their wellbeing, or they engaged in stuff to kind of cope with the stresses -- if that makes sense.

**Amara:**

Mm-hmm. Telling us the tea but without --

**King:**

Basically. But, yeah.

**Amara:**

The system -- it's the system, innit? And it doesn't really serve the true purpose of which it's built. And I think there's that conflict that makes us experience all these unnecessary tensions and frustrations and pits and falls because we can sense, we can feel, we're experiencing this -- us being engulfed in a system that doesn't really meet our needs like that. And I'm talking on several levels now, several angles.

[00:40:13]

As a black woman, as someone from a lower-class background, it just -- culturally, economically -- it's just not really meeting my needs like that. So that coupled with the fact that it's something that's almost -- it's a necessity in some ways.

Definitely me now, anyway, up until the age of 18, which means that even if someone didn't have ideas or thoughts of continuing with higher education, this is just a part of their -- this is the entirety of their youth and their childhood and stuff, which wasn't -- it wasn't like that in my day or your day. So when the system is not really meeting the needs as it ought to, then you -- what should be normal other than exam stress, school stress, I feel like it's just heightened.

It's just exacerbated by this friction with identity, with self. And even some research that I did -- I don't even know why or I can't remember. But I know that, for example, representation has a big impact on a child's or person's academic performance.

If they can see themselves being represented in the teaching hierarchy and all the teachers and in the classroom, that will positively impact the educational attainment. But, bro, if I'm -- if we're surrounded -- and this is not to be doing blame, blame, blame -- but if we're surrounded or emerged in the system that we have no choice but to be in and it's not really meeting the fullness of our needs, then, yeah.

Naturally, it's going to be really hard to bounce back from typical low points of exam stress and assignment labour and all these aspects of education that just get to you: studying, revising, or having time for -- balancing your work and your life and stuff because we have -- a lot of us, were working and studying because we couldn't afford not to. Do you know what I'm saying?

So I think that's why, that's what makes it worse. That's what makes it harder. That's what makes it difficult. For us. Basically. I don't know.

**Christine:**

No, I agree. Yeah. I truly agree. I mean, some parts of -- I think representation is such a wide conversation because there are some spaces where I feel like we need representation and some spaces where representation gets a little bit funny sometimes.

Things where we should be creating stories for ourselves by putting ourselves in stories that aren't really made for us so then it just creates some sort of tension. So I completely agree that in terms of academic success or just being able to feel like there's a point in what you're doing, you need to see yourself within that system already. We want to be psychologists because we actually saw, let's say, for us, black women, for King, black men, as psychologists and doing really exciting work.

And we kind of had it -- I'm not sure we had much of a glimpse of that black women wise in XXXX. But we did have XXXX -- maybe I shouldn't say his name? Sorry. Bleep it.

**Amara:**

And you said the uni. You said the name of the uni.

**Christine:**

Yeah. And the uni. Sorry. We're going to bleep it.

Because it was almost like, you could see yourself within that role. If you can't see yourself within a role, then how -- it's almost -- I don't know. It feels like you're walking up a hill. It's like walking up a hill that nobody else has been on; you can't see any other footprints, and you're just going to get tired before you even get to the hill. You're like, "There's nobody else up there, so why would I want to do that? Why would I want to tackle this hill?" And some people are really interested in being the explorer, the first person that does this.



But it is really -- it takes a lot of mental strength to be the first person to do stuff, to be the only people in spaces, to think that, even though you aren't the first or the only, but in the space that you're in -- the physical space that you're in -- it can feel so isolating. Uni shouldn't really feel like that. It shouldn't feel like such an exclusive space when it's meant to be inclusive learning.

[00:45:10]

This is meant to be the only space where we're all feeling free enough to say, "Yeah. I see my place within this world. I see my place within this field." And I feel like academics sometimes make you feel like, oh, you actually shouldn't enter there because you don't see yourself. And it's a lot of work, and you don't see yourself, so what would be the point? So I'm really proud of you both for actually maintaining that journey for yourselves and beating the odds in that case. Because the uni that shall not be named kind of gave us an experience that made us feel like maybe we wouldn't -- for me, anyway, which is why I stopped.

But we wouldn't actually be where we wanted to be, and that was just to be psychologists. We wanted to go; we wanted to help other people; we wanted to help ourselves. And it's kind of hard wanting to help yourself and other people when you cannot even see yourself in other people in that space, people that look like you in that space. And it kind of links back to -- moving onto this idea of potential. Because compassion, potential, and failure, those things have an internal place, but they also have an external place.

And I think when I was thinking about potential, I kind of thought a little bit around our night trips to the library and this idea that we had to push ourselves so hard that we were staying overnight to really work and the things that we still do now to really work hard and to push ourselves to go above and beyond. And it's kind of outside of Black excellence.

It's more to do with how do we allow ourselves to understand what potential we need to put where. There's a sort of balance that I think for people who are used to working hard -- don't really have -- we don't have this sort of how do we apply the right amount of energy to this thing. It's always go hard or go home. I don't know.

Is this making sense where we're kind of sitting -- we want to go to the library so bad, and we need to do this work so bad, but we end up sleeping because we're really overwhelmed by the fact that we need to do this so bad.

**Amara:**

It's not good enough. It's not good enough what we do to ourselves. And that's probably a lack of self compassion. But at the same time I feel like there's that element of grinding when it comes to education as well.

There's that element of doing the most, which is prevalent cross-culturally, cross-socially as well. It's kind of how the game goes. But it wasn't going -- we were doing the most and still the output was highly concerning.

**Christine:**

Because what could we actually say when it comes to that?

You know when you're putting all of your energy into this one thing, and it -- and the outcome is so bad that you're thinking -- I don't know what -- why does that happen? It's like there is a method that we weren't -- we didn't know that we should use or could have used. We were really going ham. And we were not getting the best grades. I mean, I think towards the very end you guys got banging grades, but I was never getting any good grades. And I was in the library like -- yeah --- in the library like Einstein.

**Amara:**

That is funny.

**Christine:**

I think it's almost like we're winding down, and we're trying to find ways of winding down. I'm going to listen to this. I feel like we touched on some things. But is there -- out of this thing around "what have we learnt" -- I think it would be nice to say have we taken part in any sort of self compassionate practices ourselves? What do we do?

**Amara:**

Personally -- I'll go first with this one -- I've always been a journaller all my life. So I guess that's a form of self compassion. But I think I've directed it more in a self compassionate style by having prompted -- by doing prompted journaling, where they ask me questions about myself, my thoughts, my day, as opposed to just journaling generally.

And I tell myself when I'm reaching my limit -- normally, or usually, I would push myself beyond -- anyway, that can be quite harmful sometimes. It might suffer my sleep or my eating and stuff like that because I want to get something done. Then I just tell myself, "Amara, go and buy yourself a nice pair of trainers."

"You've really tried. You've done so well today. That's OK darling; you will not die if you complete it tomorrow. You will not die." So, yeah. That's the kind of thing I tell myself. And that's me being self compassionate. I actually bought this gratitude journal as well, but it's too abstract for me right now. It makes me go through Memory Lane, and I have to sit there, be like, "Hmm. When was the last time I was kind to a stranger? Let me think about that."

[00:50:46]

It's just too much on my brain, mentally. It's quite tasking. But, yeah. Those are the ways I try and do self-care. But I think something I want to improve is my sleep. I need to think about my relationship with sleep and self-care and stuff in terms of the bigger picture of what health looks like. I can't keep segregating sleep as its own entity, like it just exists unilaterally in its own universe.

It's a part of my wellbeing as well.

**Christine:**

I like that. We should all be able to say, "You know what? Just buy yourself the ting, man." Why? Why you holding onto it? Buy yourself the ting. But also there's a lot of financial anxiety. And I think that's another podcast; that's another conversation. Financial anxiety -- I feel like that's a genetic -- I need to find a study -- something that tells it: it runs in the genes.

Because there is something -- why is it so hard to be able to say, "I deserve to have this, so I'm going to be able to buy it to myself." Obviously, if you cannot physically afford it, you can't physically afford it. But this is talking about, you just got paid; you have a spare £50; you might want to say, "Yo, let me -- I haven't done my nails in a month. I would actually like to treat myself to this thing." But it feels like you cannot treat yourself.

We are moving -- you know, the bankers these days are saying, "If you just cut your Netflix, cut your Spotify, you can afford a house in about --"

**Amara:**

Get out. Get out.

**Christine:**

That's when internally -- we're holding onto this idea that --

**Amara:**

-- that if you don't eat Morley's, we're going to do something amazing.

**Christine:**

I'm just letting everyone know, we will -- if you cannot afford it, you cannot afford it. If we cannot afford it, we cannot afford it.

I kind of love that journalling is definitely for her.

[00:52:59]

**King:**

Yeah. I was saying as well, for me, I feel like acceptance and understanding -- like I was saying before -- is really important. I feel like, in terms of compassion, there are certain things -- and I know, Christine, you'll understand what I'm talking about. I've just had to learn to understand so that I can accept. For example, with certain stresses and certain worries that I have in regards to my mind, my consolation in compassion to myself is usually just that.

This is something that I can't control. My mind is going to be heightened with stress and thoughts at this particular time because I'm stressed, and there's nothing really that I can do about it but just to embrace it and to accept it. So I feel like that plays -- a certain amount of understanding plays a big role in my journey of self compassion.

**Christine:**

OK. Thank you, King.

Looking back at the three terms we were meant to discuss, if you could give someone a piece of advice around, I guess, looking at it, honing it, supporting compassion or potential, what would you suggest?

**Amara:**

I would choose compassion and I will say that just always remember your compass point.

No matter how far wide or out you go, compassion is always bringing it back to yourself that I am me, and I deserve to be here, just like the moon, just like the stars, just like everyone else. I deserve to be here to take up space, take up room and be me in that room. That's it. Let that be a compass point at the time, no matter how far out you go.

**King:**

I would just say a little something about failure and I will say what I said before during the podcast that failure does not exist until you give up. So always remember that: until you give up, failure does not exist.

[00:55:00]

**Christine:**

OK. If I had to pass down some advice around the term potential or using potential -- even though we've barely touched on it throughout this discussion -- I guess I would say use that term wisely within your life.

Approach potential in a personal aspect and not a societal aspect or like a surfaced -- I'm going to say aspect again. I've said it too many times. But don't allow somebody else's idea of your potential to change your idea of potential for who you are. Personally, I think it's a little bit of a toxic word. You've got potential. You know when someone says, "You've got potential"?

It's like, "You're all right, but you can be better." And, of course, it kind of highlights a journey. It's not always said in a negative way. But I think I would just say be careful how you use it in regards to yourself because you have more than potential, babes. And as I said at the beginning, this conversation got a little bit tricky at some points.

So if you need any sort of resources or ways to help yourself to think more around compassion and, I guess, these terms, I would suggest looking deeper into the [Nap Ministry](#). Everyone knows I love the Nap Ministry. But if you haven't heard of the Nap Ministry, dig deeper into them. And also, I would say check out the Resiliency Circle -- the [Resilience Circle](#).

They have a lot of resources around climate anxiety, which I think -- sometimes we are all suffering from climate anxiety without actually knowing. But they have a lot of resources around climate anxiety, and

how to kind of approach living a positive life amongst chaos. And, lastly, I'd like to say take some time out for yourself. Buy yourself that thing. Live your best life, and stay blessed. Thanks.

*Music*

**JN Harrington:**

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[00:58:09]

END