

TW for Ep 1:

Racism

Anti-blackness

Mentions of slavery

Mentions of colourism

Mentions of historical racism by white academics

Mentions of white feminism

Karel 0:00

Hello, and thank you for listening to the PoC Squared podcast. This podcast is hosted by Seher, Pruthvi and Karel. And today's episode is an introduction to the team and the cause. But please be aware that the following topics are discussed: colourism including racism, anti blackness, slavery, police violence, alcoholism, and racialized gender bias. A transcript and show notes for this and all episodes can be found on our website, www.poc2.co.uk, that's www.poc2.co.uk. And if you have any comments or questions, we can be found on Twitter and Instagram at PoCsquared, with no spaces or you can contact us directly via our email pocsquared@gmail.com. Or the form on our website. With all that said, enjoy the episode.

Why did you guys pick to do a physics degree in the first place? So like, let's start there. Why did we all decide to do a physics degree? What's everybody's...or like, when did you first get into science?

Seher 1:25

So I started to get into science when I was in year nine, I had a really enthusiastic science teacher. And she kind of realised that I really liked physics and space. So like, she kind of encouraged me a little bit and like, she'd kind of say, "Oh, here's a book that you could read", or she'd like, just talk to me about space. So that's how I initially got into it. And then and then from that, I just I realised that space has been like the only thing that really kind of like really fascinates me, so I'd always, I'd always kind of like be fascinated by the stars and the moon and then by the planets so it kind of developed from there and then also definitely, definitely do an astrophysics degree.

Karel 2:13

Nice. Was this a - I heard you say her? Was this a woman? Was this a white woman science teacher or was it one of colour?

Seher 2:22

It was a it was a white woman. It was essentially a white, white school. I was probably one of, I'd say a handful of people of colour in my school. And definitely the only Pakastani girl there. So, yeah, just I just assume anybody I talk about is going to be white when it comes to school.

Karel 2:45

Love it, great. Oh, no. Okay. Pruthvi. What about you? What was school like for you? Did you get into physics when you were in school. And were you like the only one Asian floating around also what was going on?

Pruthvi 3:07

So it was quite interesting like my school was very majorly white up until about year 7. And there was like a massive influx of like South Asian students, but like from really rich backgrounds. So I really couldn't relate to them all that much.

Karel 3:22

I think it's I think I should point out here that you went to what did you go to private school?

Pruthvi 3:26

Yes.

Karel 3:28

You went to private school. Seher did you go to a private school?

Seher 3:31

No, mine was a state school.

Pruthvi 3:32

I'm privileged in the fact that my dad works as a maths teacher now and used to be a researcher in condensed matter until I was born and then he was like, "Time to get a real job". From the start, I was basically like science was always there. I don't think particle physics was there until I was like, 11 when I saw like documentaries on CERN. I knew that was what I wanted to go into. But, like physics and science were always there as like, my best and most favorite subjects. So it was just sort of, kind of natural for me in that sense.

Karel 4:09

And then you did a particle physics degree.

Pruthvi 4:11

Yeah, yeah, I did. I did a degree in physics and specialized for my masters. Yeah.

I think it was sort of like, there wasn't an option. I wanted to have the options there. Anyway, I didn't know I just thought if I if I wanted to change from particle something else after my Bsc, it would be easier if I did like a plain one. I don't know.

Karel 4:36

It all worked out. It's fine. It's fine. So um, for me, at least, I think I only got into physics at like the end of my end of year 11. I think when at the end of my physics GCSEs because that's the only time you did astro. I think on my exam board, at least I remember that you had circuits and like...You know, the diagrams where you had to, like work out the acceleration and stuff from a graph. And that was all fine because I've always been all right at maths. Yeah, but I only actually got into physics when we did the, you know, the two, the two seconds of astronomy right at the end of my physics GCSE. And I didn't particularly have I didn't go to a very good school. It was at the time that I went. It was a it was the biggest school in London and therefore, I think, probably in the UK. And then and like, I didn't even have physics teachers for physics. I had a biology teacher, a chemistry teacher and a random geographer because they just couldn't afford to get an actual physicist to teach GCSE physics. There was one actual physics teacher, and he taught the Sixth Form, which I didn't go to because I went to a separate college because the school was garbage. So that's what I did right at the end. I was just like "well space is cool". And then I did physics A-level, which again, only had astronomy right at the end of the final year, but I realised, because I did all the other modules in physics, I was just like, "No, I only like space the most". So then I did an astrophysics degree specifically, because, you know, Google physics and black holes and stuff comes up. And I was just like, this is cool. And then, yeah, I did a physics degree.

So something I wanted to ask was, when you guys decided to do your degrees in physics, did you have any ideas like what career you'd want to do afterwards? Or what a career in science would actually be like? Because I have no clue. I knew I wanted to do something to do with physics. And I just assumed that it would be easy because I'd get, because I knew I wanted to do a Masters as well. That was something that came up, but I definitely wanted to do a masters. So I thought I'd just get a job afterwards. I didn't know what it would be, but I always assumed I'd stay in the field. That was a big thing for me. I've always thought I'd be some kind of scientist. So when you started, did you think about what you'd actually want to do as a job?

Seher 7:11

For me, I what I always wanted to kind of aim to be someone who worked for like a space agency. That was like my dream job. I guess it kind of still is my dream job. But so I always thought I'd go into research. So I'd do a PhD afterwards. I always knew I was definitely going to do a Masters as well. But PhD was probably my aim. And then as I went through my degree, that kind of changed, I realised that that the like, anything further than my master's was just not it just wasn't something I wanted to do. And so that changed. That changed. For me Initially, it was to stay in science, but now I just do not want to stay.

Karel 8:01

Fair enough. Yeah, that's interesting because I actually I don't even know when I learned what a PhD was. But I can tell you right now it was within the last year and a half, like, I have no clue like my, I come from a working class background, I suppose. I have an older sister. She was the first person to go to university, in my family, and then I was the second. So like, nobody knew anything about anything. So I didn't even know what a PhD was before I started my degree. So again, yeah, I have literally no clue what I would do afterwards, I just thought that I would have a science shop and that will it will be easy to get. But as we all know, isn't it actually isn't.

Seher 8:42

Not at all.

Karel 8:42

Pruthvi your, your thoughts and opinions?

Pruthvi 8:46

Basically, it was sort of like, I tried to be open minded because I knew that while academia was something that my dad basically kind of brought into and sort of left. I didn't...I wasn't entirely sure. I was like, "Okay, I'll see what comes I'll see what feels right". I remember having the idea of if AcademiaTM didn't work out for me my fallback and kind of was and still kind of is, is going into science journalism. Writing for like, New Scientist or you know, Physics World or any sort of major science publication. It's something that I really like doing because I have, because, you know, I did an A-level and English Lit as well. And I kind of like the idea of making the intersection between literature and science, like really prolific, especially for the public, or those with a big lack of understanding and yeah, yeah.

Karel 9:39

Okay. So, um, so when did you first get into like, decolonizing? Because like, we all went into physics. All three of us did a physics degree of some type. But we all did it because we actually just liked science. We just we liked what we were studying. We found it interesting. So when did you actually first get into decolonizing. Or when did you first notice the issues in STEM?

Seher 10:05

So for me, I, I always noticed at uni anyway, that we would be moaning about how, like the physics society would start having like events and it would just be alcohol. And if there would be an event at like just a hosted hosted by the school, not even the society and it would just be alcohol everywhere. And that's just like that was just a main focus. I was like, Well, I don't want to do that. And I don't feel like I want to go to an event like that. So that's something that I kind of felt that there was a bit of a disconnect between a lot of people and especially people who don't drink. And then obviously, like there's people who do drink. So that's one social aspect that always kind of like separated people.

But then also that was just such a noticeable difference in the people who had the academic jobs and held held PhDs. And like their, what their ethnic background was. So there would be so many more white people than people colour. That was always something that was just in the background, but you kind of like, you're like, "Oh, yeah, it's like the faculty is white". We just know that. But then like, when you start looking at it a bit deeply, that's that's when you kind of figure out there is stuff wrong. And yeah, so a friend actually kind of helped me realise that there's little things, little...interactions between you and one of those like white academics. That would kind of it would just wouldn't sit right but then they'd have an interaction with somebody who is white and another white student and it would just be a lot more friendlier. They will just, they'll have a banter and it just like it just kind of. It showed that there was such a big disconnect between Some People and Other People. That generally seemed like the people of colour were more disconnected than the people who were white and had this little click? Yeah, yeah, that's that's mainly what kind of drove me into thinking like there's a big problem and we need to fix it.

Pruthvi 12:17

So I think it basically a lot of it stems from just like a general background of like learning about social justice throughout, I think A-level and also like the degree because that's where I sort of came from. And then when it came to the degree I kind of put two and two together like okay, you know, social

justice and your actual studies and your and the lack of people of colour in academia are very much linked. So yeah, that's where that's basically where it started. For me it sounds really like gauche and dumb but like tumblr helped a lot in terms of like, like making a reframe.

Karel 12:55

It's Okay, we forgive you for mentioning Tumblr. We just will bleep it out, it's fine. *laughs*

Pruthvi 13:05

Yeah, it really helped me kind of like, get into social justice, the movement and then reframe my understanding of like whiteness and how it affects academic spaces. And then that's when you start to look into it, and you go, okay, you know, literally, very few people of colour on the course. Academia is mostly a very white discipline, and not just made from white bodies, but focusing on the works of white people, as well, and only featuring them. And that's when I was like, hey, I need to get involved in something to change this. That's when we were introduced to, like the Queen Mary Decolonise Group. And started questioning that.

Karel 13:43

And then like, when you guys when you say that academia is really white, like did you ever notice anything to do with gender either because like, what all three women of colour, right? We're not just like, people of colour, we are specifically women as well. So we have that like. We have gender bias and racial bias. But when you were thinking about these things, did you think about one more than the other? Or like both the same amount? Did they affect you differently?

Seher 14:12

I guess I kind of I did notice more about racial diversity more than gender, usually. Because I always knew that, oh, there's not a lot of women. In general, in physics, So then, like my thought is well, of the men that we have, who's actually is what kind of racial diversity do you have in the people that we do have? So I guess it kind of started off with: Is there a racial diversity in the men that we have? And then is there racial diversity in the women that we have? And for us, our department was like zero women of colour. So I guess It was kind of a, it was kind of like a step, kind of going through it step by step seeing like overall and then like seeing what the main issue is kind of thing.

Karel 15:08

Yeah.

Pruthvi 15:09

So I remember, I think during the first couple of years of undergrad, we'd always get emails about diversity schemes in STEM, and they'd all be focused on women in STEM. When I started doing the decolonizing work I realised that there was no such effort for people of colour, scheme for people of colour in STEM like there was no awareness there. And that of those women in physics and women in STEM schemes, the focus was primarily on white women. They were the ones featured. They were the ones on the brochures and you know, leaflets and blah de blah. All the things I remember some emails about like a, like an event that would talk about the achievements of women in physics, but all those women, all those historical women physicists and they were all white. There was just no care about the inclusion of people of colour, especially women of colour. And just like fast forwarding to my PhD, the induction day like, it was brought up as a stat on the EDI slide, there was a breakdown of the gender, the gender breakdown, gender ratio in the School of physical sciences, and also the individual departments. But there was no such mention of race, there was nothing about that. And even though we all know when we apply, we give, we give our race, right we give our race to the to the department, and that it's not used and no one cares about the figures. So like there's a real lack of care over the statistics concerning people of colour in academia.

Seher 16:53

So like clarity of people who don't know what it is, but EDI is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Or just generally Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Generally every school at university, every department at university should have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which us three kind of all had a bit of a part of in our own school of physics at Queen Mary.

Karel 17:24

Yes, yes, The actual D is for diversity. But, you know, the actual diversity on these committees do vary quite a bit. And the actual level of care on these committees do vary quite a bit. And I won't go into that right now. Because again, this is Episode One, and we have several episodes just built specifically for complaining about this, but don't be surprised if they're not that great.

Yeah, like I am. for me, at least I'll say that I've kind of got into EDI like kind of selfish reasons at first, but now I truly care about it.

But like, throughout my life, I've kind of always- So like, especially being black specifically. And especially being a black woman in physics, I was pretty much always on my own if there were other people of colour there be maybe a couple of Asian people if I'm lucky, but definitely never any other black people or definitely never ever any other black women. But I don't know I kind of like thrived on it just because I don't know like, it would be like a point of pride. My Mum and my Dad would be like, Oh, you're the only black girl here well done Karel. And I was like, "Yeah, I am the only black girl here look at me go", and then that kind of, when you're in school and whatever, you just do your lessons and then go home. So like it wasn't that big of a problem because you know, in school things because, you know, stuff is not nationally. Everything is quite systematic. So I didn't actually have too many issues.

So this went through all the way, through most of my degree. And again, I think it would come up more in like, not in the actual subjects but more in the actual but the social aspect. So like Seher said, when people were drinking, it was mostly white people, and I don't like white people's music, and I don't drink so I wasn't going to any of those. And that was more cuz...Again, it was the physics society so it's like, they're part of the- It's not just them going, going to a party or something. It's like to do with the actual University. So that was a bit of a disconnect. And then like, I found it hard to talk to lecturers and stuff to get help. But I thought everybody did and didn't realise that they were like, that people were friends with them. That seemed to happen to be like overnight and that was like a shock. When I got into like, my Masters that people were calling lecturers by their first names and stuff like that. But, um, so that was gross. And I realised now that again, it was just me being naive, I thought everybody had these issues. And the fact that they didn't really annoys me, but *laughs* it really got to me when again, um, I was, I was applying for PhDs. And it's really difficult to get a PhD. And I knew that's what I wanted to do, because I do genuinely like physics. And despite like the garbage time I had at uni that didn't change. So I was just like time to get one. But it was really hard. And I didn't get one the first time around, I applied twice, and I got one the second time, which I'm starting soon. And it was sort of around that time because I was just like, because it was the first time I'd come up against like a true barrier.

And then...I hope it's to do with my nature and not just because I'm just being a mess, but I was just like, Okay, well, I've hit this barrier. But all people of colour seem to hit this barrier. And I kind of know now why I didn't hit any before, but I definitely know there are more. And I kind of got into EDI through that. I was just like Okay. So they're not paying brown people to work for

them. They're not paying black people to work for them. And I'm a black person, and I need money to live. So what is going on? And I wasn't really winning tonight compromise. All I want to do is physics pretty much. And so I kind of got into diversity because I was just like, I'm not like, yeah, I wasn't willing to compromise. And so, I got into diversity that way, because I was just like. What? Why aren't we? Why isn't everybody given a fair chance at being able to do what they want to do? And then I learnt more about the curriculum, and how I was just like: Wow, I know no black people. Not just in terms of like my friends on the course. But also literally I've never heard a black person's name spoken ever, in the last 10 years that I've been in education, and it sort of just snowballed from there.

Seher 22:18

So let's talk about the curriculum then. So like, what points of the curriculum did you kind of pick up on that? Kind of fell into the whole "We need to decolonise it"? So what points did you kind of pick on?

Karel 22:35

Yeah, um, good question. Again. For me, it was more about the...It wasn't the lack actually flipping this. It wasn't like the lack of people of colour. But like, so I'd sit next to Pruthvi a lot in lectures just because we both wear glasses. And if we're anything further back than three rows, we can't see anything in the front and nobody else and we were just so upset because we didn't want to be in the front, but that was like. And every couple of lectures, they'd mention the name of some guy, right? You know, some scientists we were learning about who I'm sure I'll scream about in another episode. And then Pruthvi, would be like, "Hey, did you know this guy used to kill black people?" Or like, "Did you know this guy had slaves?" Or I can't remember who it was but you were just like, "Oh, yeah, this guy was gay, but he was also super racist". And I was just like *laughing*, just like crying, because I was wrecked. And then, but obviously, it was a physics lecture. So I had not paid attention for about half a second. And therefore I'd missed like 4 slides and I didn't know what was happening. And so that's kind of like the main thing that got me into the curriculum.

I was just like, this curriculum is a gross, disgusting nightmare. Like because again, I wasn't thinking about the lack of people of colour, because I was a stupid mess also, and thought "Oh it's about the numbers. It's subjective. So it doesn't matter". I know better now, don't worry. I was just like what else the numbers are fine. I want to learn about like a racist. I don't want to learn about a man who owned slaves. You know, I don't want to learn about a guy who had one marginalization but still hated black people. And that was like

the main issue I got into. And then again, just in general decolonizing, you hear about how there's a lack of people of colour featured, and oh my god, they're right. There's no black people on this curriculum. And that's kind of why I was just like we need to decolonise the curriculum to me, at least.

Pruthvi 24:39

Yeah, I completely agree. I also think the people who like are associated with science and who may plan to, like, go into academia further, like need to realise that we need to stop putting the racist white scientists. Famous scientists who were really bad people up on pedestals. And you know, just deifying them constantly. And I think physics out of all the disciplines in academia does that a lot. Yeah, because of how connected physics as a discipline is with, you know, the, the absoluteness of, of like the universe and you know, how it governs a lot of things. People think that people who come up with theories to describe that must be really good people, because they're really clever when in fact, they are also people who have had biases due to like, you know, political and social, like, issues that, you know, that they were in during that time, and we will have people who are affected by biases of that time. And it's not, it's not a political or it's not an objective to you know, even like, talk about but it's a really important thing because it informs how the research is done, right and people research that work is wrong. Quite frankly, that's just how I feel about it.

Karel 25:58

Yep!

Seher 25:59

Yeah. That kind of affects a lot of different sciences as well. The whole, if you're, if you have biases, then it's going to affect a lot of your work. So, for example, medicine, yeah. And obviously like, I know that we're going to go on about this in another episode, but just

Karel 26:19

It's fine, put it in. They need to hear it.

Seher 26:20

So a lot of medical research is based on white bodies, as opposed to people of colour. So a lot of recommendations we get in medicine is based on what a white person's body is like, what will react to, but that might not necessarily work for us. And also a lot of research was done on unwilling black slaves.

Karel 26:50

dying

Seher 26:52

People seem to forget that there was such an unethical past to a lot of medical research. A lot of times they don't even bring it up in lectures, and I feel that that is something that is another failure of the curriculum and academia is that, you need to hold people accountable and say, "Okay, this is something that was done and this is something that we're never going to do again". You kind of need to, you need to acknowledge that. There is a super shady past but that you need to move on and get better.

Karel 27:23

Yep, definitely.

Pruthvi 27:25

I like I feel like there is definitely more of an exploration of that in the medical sciences. You know, I feel like it's very- Yeah, exactly. It's very underrepresented in the mathematical sciences. Sometimes, you know, I don't want to say like obviously...like obvious reasons you doing because like how the nature of how like how directly medicine impacts you know, people, right? At the same time, I don't think it's like that an entire field of study and entire branch academia, ie physics just goes like you know, by the wayside with regards to this, you're completely right and saying that it does need to be explored a lot more.

Karel 28:01

Exactly. Yeah, I think as well, science, especially especially the mathematical ones, seeing these decolonizing efforts that seem to go on in other subjects, perhaps the humanities, the arts, or something, and they sort of self excused themselves from them under the excuse that science is "objective", or we "shouldn't politicize science", when in fact, the act of decolonizing science is the act of depoliticizing it because you're literally putting in more facts into the science. And I think that's one of the evasive one of the biggest downfalls of the subject and how and the way that it seems to operate right now.

Seher 28:48

That's actually something that kind of pushed us all into kind of starting to take action in our own like school of physics. We'd see one of our friends, she was one of the higher-ups in Decolonize Queen Mary. And she was working a lot with the humanities side, and there'd be really obvious kind of downfalls in their curriculum, and people would be able to point out so as they only focus on Eurocentric literature in their lectures, so, that's something that's quite

obvious and you can kind of pick it out. And for us, we would see that. Well, we don't really know what we could say about the literature in ours, because physics is physics. So we didn't really know how to kind of proceed. At least initially, for me, because I feel I felt like if I said something, or something's wrong, then people would say, No, you're just kind of playing up this Nothing wrong with what we're doing here. You know, I guess that's kind of what made it difficult. But it also was a driving force like, yes, there is something wrong. So we kind of need to push for it to get better.

Karel 30:11

Yeah, I think especially as it took several months. Like, we haven't been doing this for too long, like a year and a half, I think? But it did take several months for us to even like, work out fully what was going on, and this wasn't like an overnight thing, because I remember so like the first sort of diversity thing I went to Seher took me to after we went to Nando's, because of course we did, and I was just like, I'll come to this because I want to avoid rush hour. It was at 5pm. And also I'm not getting the tube and then a bus during this time, similar to that. And I remember there was a girl talking about how in a lecture one time they were talking about like slavery or something and everybody turned because this girl was black. And then like another time lecturer was talking about slavery but cotton workers and didn't like talk about how these were literally enslaved human beings. And that's whilst you know, gross and disgusting and crispy is something that you can easily point out right?

Pruthvi 31:16

Yeah.

Karel 31:17

But one of the things that we talk about and we constantly have to defend ourselves about is how we're like, that there's nothing like that that happens in physics and we understand that say if they were talking about Eddington, who Pruthvi said before was both a gay man and but also extremely racist, right? There's no like, we understand that there's no true gain from sticking our hands up in the middle of a lecture when talking about like the Eddington Luminosity Limit or whatever. But he was a gay man who was racist, like there's nothing to gain from that, you know, physics lecture. But It was really hard I think for all of us to work out how to even approach that as a subject because it does affect science even if it doesn't affect the numbers.

Pruthvi 32:12

Exactly, even if it doesn't affect us all work you know directly™ it's still upholds this culture of whiteness, right? And protecting whiteness and you see that all throughout. I mean this is like a whole different episode, but you see that all throughout how, like all the publishing sites and all the publishing journals etc are like white focused and producing like western world. There is this cultural whiteness that needs to be dismantled and identifying toxic academics both you know, current and in the past is one way of doing that and that's why just important to shed light on it.

Karel 32:50

Yes, agreed. And whilst you're talking about that was one that really good point, and I thought now would be a good chance to talk about so we have some like possible solutions. Every episode we're going to, we're going to talk about an issue but also going to, you know, mention some things that can change. That might be easy, might be difficult to do, but things that we think that actually improve the state of sort of STEM academia as it is now.

So Pruthvi you just said, one of the things is how, again, how we focus a lot on Western whiteness. And essentially, the main thing we're saying is that like science that we said, it's not apolitical and it's not, it's not objective, it wasn't created in a bubble. Then both like throughout history, and today, people of colour have always done science. It just it's not in the same way that West does it. A lot of the time it was actually mixed with religion, but we'll go into that in another episode. But yeah, in most cultures, science and religion are just the same thing. And I think one of the big things that could be done to fix that is again, just mention in lectures and show pictures and show the works of scientists of colour. Both throughout history and today, a lot of the work we learn about was just stolen from people of colour who'd already discovered it on their own, in their own cultures, but then was ignored thanks to literal colonialism in that they would like to steal these people like they destroy these people's countries and not actually take any of the work that was done seriously. So I think that's one big thing that could be easily implemented into like most subjects. Just in lectures, just generally putting in scientists of colours, along with the white ones. If a white scientists discovered something first, it's worth mentioning them, but if you put them all on the same level and legitimizes all of the scientists.

Pruthvi 34:52

Exactly it's true. I think another important point is still like, when you when you have this sort of content and when you have any kind of lecture or course regarding decolonising they bring forth your students or other you know all you know, lectures or teaching in faculty. Yeah. Like don't make sure it's not

like a you know, make sure it's not an optional thing. Make sure it's compulsory, right? Yes. I feel like a lot of, you know, EDI committees, including the one I am literally in talks with at Liverpool want to relegate this to a side project, a sort of side show or one off thing? Let's be honest, those things will be attended only by, you know, people of colour like lectures of colour, or students of colour. It's not going to get to the people who need to hear it the most. So making sure those things are compulsory and open and accessible to everyone is the most important thing because EDI stuff is always always a side thing and the only people who generally care about it are people of colour.

Karel 35:57

Yeah, people who are already marginalized who don't really need the information. Something else I thought could be a really important solution is the idea of like, analysing research practices as you teach things to people. So this is how you, this is how you bring up because a lot of people, a lot of literal lectures, I should say, I should stress that I am a PhD student, I haven't even started yet. I'm starting in a month, but lectures are coming to me when I say, like when I bring up these issues when they're supposed to be, you know, dealing with it, but it's whatever, but the way you can like bring up these things in your lecture in your lectures is talking about like research practices. When you teach the science...because the way they find out self impacts what they found out. That way you can bring up how if you you know this again, there's no point in just saying, oh, he was like racist and move on because people aren't going to, like, some might not remember it. And it's not like really going to impact the way they work. So these people aren't going to, they're going to continue these bad practices. But if you bring up these issues within research practices, you could actually talk about how it impacted the work that they did. So, then, and that's how you actually weave it into being a compulsory and valued part of the curriculum. And it's not easy, but it actually it's, it's very important, and it's not particularly

Pruthvi 37:34

um,

Karel 37:35

I wouldn't say. Actually, I wouldn't say it's not easy. I'd say it's actually quite easy to do. It's not that difficult, should I say? So you can bring up things like how they how some cultures, specifically, most mostly Western cultures, you know, improvements to navigation, which was done by learning that the Earth goes around the Sun, as opposed to everything going around the Earth and things like that only happened to facilitate colonialism. So they were

losing slave ships at sea and things like that. And they weren't getting to countries that they were trying to take over fast enough. And that's the only reason that they got better at finding out where they were. Where as Polynesian cultures and especially like Islam and things like that they will all voyagers and use them for religious purposes and just general interest. And you can see the two different ways that they've discovered the same thing.

Pruthvi 38:32

There's an interesting conversation to be had about the pride a lot of people and a lot of academics in the West take about their, like atheism, as like, you know, scientists of colour having a religion. It sort of shows and the fact that you know, like you said, a lot of science of colour, like a lot of you know, people of colour scientists from you know, in ancient times, we fuse together their religion and their scientific methods, right. And their reason for wanting to do science, and you'll see that a lot of the time when it was devised in the West, you know, it wasn't just it wasn't just a way of understanding the truth about the world around us. It was a way to help facilitate colonialism and concur people of colour and their spaces. And, you know, resources like that's what it was. And that's a really good thing to you know, to do in general. It's like, when you're teaching a subject, or teaching anything, always talk about the motivations for the people who discovered it, like always mention why all possible motivations people who discovered stuff, like that's just something that should be there, because you're like taking into account history. And yeah, you put it really, really well. And I think and the final thing, I think the one thing I really want to bring up is making sure that you know how a lot of science departments will...You know hopefully go on talks with different academics and different universities I think focusing on bringing in more people of colour academics and lecturers to talk. I think it's incredibly important for the student body to have an experience like that. I think it'll help make a lot of students of colour feel included and welcome as well. I know that in Liverpool, for example, there literally is someone doing it, but for women, and I had to talk to someone on the EDI committee going "Hey, how about we do the same thing, but you actually look for people of colour to give talks?"

Karel 40:38

Yes.

Pruthvi 40:41

Yeah, literally, it's like they see they see it see women, this is just it's just keeps, you know, bringing it to the forefront for me that they see having women in

STEM as a priority but they could they could not care about, you know, the impact race has, you know, I mean, it's a continuous thing.

Seher 41:02

I was just gonna say cuz the race thing is very important when it comes to how a student learns I think as well. So for me at uni, I actually got along with more the well the few people of colour we had in the like, as academics I got along with them and learned a lot from them both scientifically and like kind of, I guess kind of life wise because as there was one academic that I'd i guess I could talk about general life with. And they just, they just made you feel comfortable. And it kind of made made you feel like you're meant to be there to learn. And there wasn't. There isn't like you have respect for them. you'd call them sir. They were men of just physics. But it kind of it legitimized your place there. It didn't make you feel like you didn't belong. It closed that disconnect. So just seeing people and talking to people of colour, people who look like you, even in any kind of any walk of life, it's just about representation and it, it makes you feel like you're not like a weirdo for liking something. And you have the right to be there.

Karel 42:36

Yes, I definitely agree.

Pruthvi 42:38

Yeah, exactly. It's really important to understand what inclusivity actually means. And, having more lectures that academics of colour definitely definitely is part of this.

Karel 42:51

Yes, not just like, one or two, but several as well because like I said, I'm I'm black. Whilst there were a few very, very few Asian people there, like Asian lecturers should I say? There were no black ones and I was still like dying all the time. And whilst by the end again, I'd sort of joined like all the people of colour and I do mean literally all the Asian people and me floating around with one random white friend who was allowed in and that was it. It was, there were times where it wasn't like I didn't I don't think I can think of a single lecturer that I could say that I truly felt like really okay with. Back in uni. And I think it's worth just getting in getting in several getting in a few blacks amongst the people of colour would be nice is all I'm saying.

Pruthvi 43:55

Definitely and I think that's good. That's a conversation to be had about to what extent if...is using, you know, the term people of colour, especially when

doing decolonising work to like, you know, use for all the people call as opposed to like, you know, set like, you know, kind of making sure that individual marginalization within the people of colour group like get talked about as well. So I think it's a really important point to bring up that you are the literal only black undergraduate student on your year of the course. And it's, it says a lot because we, we all did our, you know, degrees at Queen Mary University of London, which is meant to be, you know, one of the, one of the most highly populated like, universities in terms of, you know, PoC representation™, and it's still absolutely dire, especially especially in the mathematical sciences.

Karel 44:49

Yes, agreed, completely agreed. And we as we know, as we know, from an Ild really recommend you check this out if you haven't, but I want to mention that Goldsmiths University, which is also a London University, it's more a humanities University, but it's very, very diverse. And it just finished a- I think it's 128 day occupation.

Pruthvi 45:14

Oh, yes.

Karel 45:16

Which I actually visited on the 49th and 50th day that they were protesting. Yeah, I went to them. I bought them a cake. So clearly I led the whole thing because I bought this one cake. Like, very, very Brown, very black university in the middle of I can't stress this enough. London, England. Yeah. had to protest for almost four months against racism. Okay, so just to show that like, just these universities, they, they're supposed to be good for not just diversity, but specifically ethnic diversity. And even if they are, they don't, it shows that they don't actually truly care, because again, a university that's good for ethnic diversity will not have literal undergraduates protesting for almost four months against racism. And they were they were absolutely brilliant I need to say again look this up if you can. The occupation was successful, but the university before they accepted what were literally fair and reasonable demands from the occupation, ie to actively stop the racist abuse some of the students were undergoing to take down the statues of literal slave owners, and you know, to and they had other demands. They had a whole list you can find it on their website it's absolutely brilliant, but they [Goldsmiths] threatened to take them to court and evict them via violence and police before they signed the list of 12 demands. This is after extensive media coverage. And this was after 120, you know, almost, I think was 252. In the

end 252 of their own lecturers who work for the university signed a petition against them doing this. So it's just

Pruthvi 47:18
nightmarish. Yeah.

Karel 47:20
Again, you can read the whole thing. It's again, because it literally only finished last night. All of the amazing and I can I say again, the people who occupied it were mostly women of colour. Can I say the were a few? I don't even know if there were any guys within those one or two white guys, surprisingly, but-

Seher 47:38
there was a number one, at least one man of colour there. So there are a few but obviously, like the main point is that it is it was mainly women of colour who were doing it.

Karel 47:53
And like you said, because it finished literally yesterday. We're recording this on July 28. July Yeah. So like, again, any of their demands that they got signed have not been put into effect yet because they're probably all asleep. They left the town hall at 3am. But um, it just shows it goes to show that these universities that are extremely diverse don't actually care about race. And you need to be very, very careful when dealing with them. But again, they were successful and they were such a good that they were absolutely brilliant. Like I've never seen anything like it and it shows that, I think it was definitely worth protesting antiracism because if you don't then what are you doing for your not only for everyone but for yourself. You should hold yourself in high enough regard that you don't just let a university that you go to as a person of colour continue to be racist.

Pruthvi 48:53
Yeah, exactly.

Seher 48:54
I just really hope that this kind of like, it causes a chain reaction So like it, hopefully kind of shows that other university's need to take this action as well.

Karel 49:05
Yeah, definitely. I mean, like, they all definitely need to. If you're listening to this, you'll find out in later episodes, because there is a lot. There's a lot of stuff

going on that is systematic, we should formally introduce ourselves because we've had this really good talk, I think, yeah, but we've never actually said, who we are and what we do. And then we can go on to our next bit, which is like, where we recommend media. And I'll introduce that when we get to it. So who wants to go first? Who wants to formally introduce who they are and what they do?

Seher 49:36

So I am Seher. I am a co-founder of PoC Squared. I am currently unemployed, but I will have a will be starting a job in software engineering very soon.

Karel 49:53

Nice. And what did you do at uni? What was your degree?

Seher 49:56

I did astrophysics degree and masters. It's great.

Pruthvi 50:01

Yeah, I'm Pruthvi. I'm a co-contributor to PoC Squared. So I write articles and do stuff. Yeah. And I am currently a first year PhD student at the University of Liverpool. Doing research in neutrino physics, I did a bachelor of science, physics and a Master of Science in particle physics at the Queen Mary University of London. And yeah, that's, that's, that's me.

Karel 50:39

Okay, so I'm Karel. Well, now I'm the other co-founder of PoC Squared. It's me and Seher. So we're the two co-founders. I'm starting a PhD at the University of Nottingham on September 1. So I just say that I'm a PhD student even though I'm not but nobody can stop me. I don't know what the PhD is going to be on. It's in astrophysics, but I start- most PhDs start in October. I start in September because they give me a month to read papers and then pick one. But it will probably be on something to do with black holes and quasars because that's what I like. And I did an integrated Master's in astrophysics. So degree and masters in astrophysics at Queen Mary likes Seher did.

So the next section is on media recommendations. And I think we should always promote the importance of self care, because as we said before, most diversity is led by the women in the field. So not only do you have for example, disabled women, or women of colour or something. So not only do you have the gender bias, but then you have the other marginalization on top, and it's very common for all of us to just get burnt out. You'll hear that

word a lot burnout. And it's because we're all just suffering. And nobody takes care of themselves. Because if we don't, we literally just don't get paid. And we'll just start dying. So this part is about, we recommend, we're recommending media that either features or were made by people of colour, in a way to promote diversity and to promote the idea of self care and avoiding burnout. And whilst you can do little things that decolonise every day is important that you take time to just relax, and you know, sleep and eat and exercise and just like turn off, because we don't usually get that luxury and it's really bad because we need it more than most people I would say. So all three of us have something that we would like to recommend. So who wants to go first?

Pruthvi 52:53

Basically something I think anyone who knows me knows I like science fiction. And I think there's a big problem in sci fi with a lot of the creators of the medium, and also the content of the medium being very white centric. That I very recently came across the works of a recently deceased, but pretty famous science fiction author Ursula K Le Guin. She does a lot of, she wrote a lot of sci fi fantasy novels. I recommend her work basically, because it heavily features people of colour as main characters. I'm currently reading the Left Hand of Darkness, which is set in a world where you have a race of individuals whose gender fluctuates throughout their life due to like mating cycles, but it's sort of like more gender cycles. And the main character in it is a dark skinned black man. And it's I've literally just got into it after reading The Dispossessed, which is a whole other book set in the same universe on a different planet about a socialist and capitalist society and how they are at odds with each other and one of the main characters match was a dark skinned women of colour. And yeah, like it's scifi. It's like political sci fi features heavily themes of the exploration of race, and sexuality, in fantasy worlds. I think that's just a really nice thing to read. Just to feel included in stuff that you like. It's just an important thing. So yeah, that's my recommendation. Love it.

Karel 54:35

Love it. It sounds great. Okay, who's next?

Seher 54:39

So my recommendation is a YouTube channel. She's called For Harriet. And she is a black woman from America. And she talks about a lot of race issues, diversity issues, colourism. So she talks, usually mainly about black issues. And she, she can talk about these issues with regards to TV shows, or she calls them like trash shows as well. So it could be, it could be like a reality TV show what issues kind of come into that. So it kind of makes you realise that these

kind of issues do come up in a lot of different ways. But she makes it quite entertaining. And she's quite bubbly and really easy to watch. So I definitely recommend her.

Karel 55:41

Okay, so my recommendation is actually a comic book series. Um, I don't know if a lot of people know this about me, but I am just like a giant mess. I'm like a weeb. All I do is play video games and reading comics. All comics are bad, all anime is bad. Video games are bad. But this, this one that I'm talking about is the only good one. And it's because it's good because first of all, it's DC. And we all know that DC is better than Marvel. But it's cool. Well, it's not controversial because that's a fact. But it's called Naomi. And it's it stars. It's basically it's just a comic book series that stars a black female girl. And I find in most like, not just like comics, but also like sci fi media stuff that like the humans are white, or like white passing, but like, the aliens are played by like, people of colour, but in like costumes. You know, even in something like I don't know, like Suicide Squad. I know they had Will Smith as Deadshot but Killer Croc was played by a black man, you know, like, tip-toe crocodile scales and I had no idea. He was black. And just like other than literal only the old Star Trek The new one can choke because they whitewash everybody. But in the old Star Trek Uhura, he was played by the one woman, was a black woman and that's really all I've had up until now. It's a comic book series that I have, you might hear me like rustling the paper because I literally have all six of them in my hands. Yeah, the first chapter I suppose. First of all, the story isn't over but they've stopped publishing for now because they are still writing it. It is out and it's about a girl who is, a black girl who's like a dark skinned black girl who has like braids and things. She's also not, the other thing I hate when they have a black character, but they give them white features like blonde hair and blue eyes and forget that get rid of that this girl is just black, right? And she's trying to, I don't want to spoil too much but she's adopted and she has two white parents, but also that she just feel so out of place and it's really weird. It's not like a comic where she suddenly gets superpowers. And then she's like, oh, why? Why am I like the only person with superpowers, she's literally just a normal black girl in the DC world. But Superman crashes into her town he's fighting. He's fighting somebody, I can't remember who it is. He smashes them into their town before leaving with the supervillain. And it follows like her seeing him and just thinking about how she as a black girl who has two adoptive parents who are white, how she feels the same as Superman, who must feel really alone being a literal alien on Earth. And she, and it's about her like trying to find out who her parents are. But also again, it's in DC, so I wonder if she gets superpowers or not. The writing is really cool. And it's written by one of the same people who made

Into The Spiderverse, so you can actually trust them. I really recommend it. I think I bought the physical versions on Forbidden Planet. I don't think they have all of them. But I definitely know where you can get the comic online. So I'll just put a link to that in the show notes at some point. But that was my recommendation.

Pruthvi 59:16

Yeah, that was really good. But I'd also like to talk about, you mentioned, people of colour playing aliens in various scifi. There's a big problem like even in Star Trek: TNG, Worf, or the entire race of Klingons, every single Klingon that was on the show were played by a black person. When I realised I was like, What What the hell? That was bad. Yeah. Yeah. Like that's a good that's a good point. Some people probably like talk about in like a different episode at some point. Yeah, yeah.

Karel 59:52

Yeah. So yeah, that's one of the things that I bring up about this about how she is just again, not only a black human, but also Not a random blond haired, blue eyed, black human, which kills me every time I see it every time I see that I die every time. So I really recommend it. But I like all of our recommendations. I like how some of them are free, like For Harriet so you can just see them online and some of them you do have to buy. They won't always be. You have to buy them though. I'm sure we'll come up with free ones as we go on. But I think I think that's it.

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