

TW for episode 2:

Mentions of racism

Mentions of alcoholism

Mentions of poverty

Karel Green 0:00

Welcome back to the PoC Squared podcast, hosted by Sehher, Pruthvi and Karel. Today's episode is about the barriers BAME people face when trying to get a PhD. But please be aware that the following topics are discussed: racism, alcoholism and poverty. 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.

So what is a PhD? for anybody who doesn't know what is a PhD? Can either of you define what a PhD is? We could have a Google.

Pruthvi Mehta 0:07

A gateway to academic hell.

Karel Green 0:11

Love it.

Sehher Tariq 0:12

Very positive.

Karel Green 0:13

Okay, so I've googled it. And the Google definition is, it's a Doctor of Philosophy. It's the highest university degree that is conferred after a course of study by universities in most countries. PhDs are awarded for programs across the whole breadth of academic fields. So essentially, it's the highest honor you can get from a university and you tend to do it after your main degree and Master's but not always. Okay.

Sehher Tariq 0:43

Well, what we would usually kind of simplify that down to is, it's when you have specialized in something that you're really interested in, and then you do three years of research on that. And then at the end of it, you will defend your research.

Karel Green 1:00

Yeah.

Sehher Tariq 1:00

I'll say like, this is right. I'm completely right. And then that's it. You've got your PhD.

Karel Green 1:07

Yeah. And afterwards you get the prefix is that it? But you get called a doctor in your field. And even though PhD is short for Doctor of Philosophy, you can get a PhD in any subject. Okay, so we're talking about PhDs today and our episode title is called BME climb to PhD. So what is the main problem that we have with PhDs?

Sehher Tariq 1:33

So the main thing is, is that we have noticed that there's not many BME in PhDs. So that is the main problem. There's something stopping Black and Asian Minority Ethnic people from going on to further - well going further than doing your masters. So that is something that's actually being researched. And that's something we've we really kind of focus on with POC squared is how we can actually get people will get people further on.

Pruthvi Mehta 2:10

Yes, exactly. So that's it, like you said, one of the main focuses, and I'm sure we'll have in the show notes, the exact statistics on this, hopefully for physics, but - or just STEM in general, but it might just be like a general for all subjects, because who knows? If they've actually done, you know, the data for each individual?

Yep.

Karel Green 2:39

That can stay in. That's just the podcast episode.

Pruthvi Mehta 2:44

laughs

Karel Green 2:46

Hopefully it will be in the show notes, the actual statistics on this, but we found that the main point to recognize here is that a PhD is the first time somebody in academia goes from being a paying consumer, as a student or a master's student, to being an actual paid employee, as a researcher for university, and that's the that's the key point here. And that's what's causing this large barrier. Because it's kind of twofold because there is the issues where a lot of BME don't feel comfortable in academia and decide to leave after doing a Masters for example. But then there's the other side where people who do want to do a PhD, despite already having barriers there for people of color, find that physically they literally can't get one because it's so competitive.

Pruthvi Mehta 3:49

I think what'll be quite helpful at this stage is to basically - Like so Karel and I are doing PhD's and I think it'd be quite helpful to talk about our personal experiences with regards to applying and the kind of culture we had, like we kind of encountered while applying and the stuff that we had to deal with.

Karel Green 4:10

Yeah, um, I'd say the first thing that I think about when I'm applying, when I was applying for PhDs - and also shameless plug here, we have a whole guide on our website on how to apply for a PhD, if you're not white, because it isn't easy, and it takes literally six months from beginning to end. But the first thing I think of when I was applying for PhDs, both the first and the second time, was that it happens during the worst time in your life to be doing so. It

literally is during when you're trying to write up your master's research. And at that point, you don't really understand your results. You might not have all of the graphs and things that you need, but it's only research you've ever done. So you're going into interviews with unfinished research that some people don't fully understand. I certainly didn't understand mine until a year after I submitted it and got a grade for it. And you've got to somehow, like, explain that to people and convince them to hire you because you're not doing that much. So that's the main thing. I remember, at least at the beginning.

Pruthvi Mehta 5:20

What do you think about the, the advice given to you by - cause we both went to Queen Mary University of London - like what do you think about the advice given to you either by the physics department there or like external like PhD fairs or whatever? Like, was any of that advice helpful to you personally?

Karel Green 5:38

So quick answer is no.

Any kind of formal advice, like all right, so the reason I got a PhD I would say in my personal opinion, was help from a friend who is a postdoc, and just a random lady who I met through like friends of friends who is like, so lovely, but any kind of not formal advice that I got from like the careers department, the physics department or specific creative lady whose job is to help physics students and career fairs that you went to Pruthvi and bought back information on, all of that was fundamentally useless. It doesn't tell you anything about how to actually apply, and it ends up wasting a lot of time that you really just don't have.

Pruthvi Mehta 5:41

Yeah, that's true. Um, what do you think about the interview experience, especially comparing from like university to university? What was that like for you?

laughs

Karel Green 6:36

Mostly, it was all a blur. I remember the interview for the universities that I liked a lot more than the ones that I did, like surprisingly, which is strange. It should be noted here that I actually went to all of my interviews in person. It was like - it was fine, all the same kinds of questions. I wish that they were - I wish I'm okay with how they are, but I kind of wish they were shorter because I, I don't always have to see the whole campus kind of thing. And this it takes long to travel all the way up there and stuff. Obviously I'm happy that I saw the campus of the university I'm actually going to, so I just found it like stressful, long and really just like, yeah, well, it wasn't great because it's this weird thing of they're trying to convince you to come to their university, but you're trying to convince them to hire you. Like, it's not just like, it's not like a job interview where you're specifically going there because you want that job. It's half and half. It's like both people are interviewing, and there's like, and you'll get things like, there'll be 12 of you and it turns out, there's 12 of you on two to three different days. So there's like 36 people, and it turns out they'll have like two spaces for a PhD. And they'll just tell you that, and that just really knocks your confidence, chances are so slim. Yeah. So I just the interviews were a massive, massive stress that took like a whole month, I had like a month of interviews.

Pruthvi Mehta 8:20

Yeah what I'm just going to chime in with my experiences here, so I basically was applying for PhD places like during my master's year and it was just it was pretty hellish due to the fact that I had a pretty major like thing healthwise, my kneecap dislocated and I was you know, at home and could not move.

Karel Green 8:42

Yep you had exams, and you couldn't go to lectures that you needed to be at and was very sick.

Pruthvi Mehta 8:47

It was a mess because all of my interviews- first of all I had to email every single institution going, Hey, this has happened and I can't go to you in person. Can I have a you know, Skype interview and Skype interviews are notorious for like, well for one, I remember with my interview with Imperial they didn't even have a working video link on their end so I couldn't even see them and this is the, what, most funded Physics Department in the UK? And

they couldn't even be bothered to get a working video feed for one of their literal hiring process and PhDs which was DISGOSTEN.

Karel Green 8:51

laughs

Pruthvi Mehta 9:00

Um, what else - I also remember the questions for each interview being very, very dependent on the institution. So Imperial, were just riding my behind with regards to like stuff I hadn't studied properly yet. So - and stuff that wasn't even relevant to what I wanted to study. So instead of, you know, like asking about my interests do with neutrino physics, which I specified, they were like, oh, do this, you know, quantum field theory thing. Do you remember this equation off the top of your head, which you won't need for a PhD, which you don't need to do, right? Whereas Liverpool were very much - the place that took me on - were very much on you know, what is your passion in this field what you like about neutrino physics? Why do you like this about, you know, charge parity violation, whatever, they were very much more kind of, we want to see how you fit in well the department and where your interest lies so we can help you. And I think that's the key that differentiates good institutions to do a PhD at versus bad ones like how they treat you in the interview process and how they actually like, think about how you fit in, as opposed to, do you know everything? Because you can't and you won't, and you won't even when you finish a PhD. So yeah, like, it was it was a mixed bag. I think I think I made the right decision. In the end. It was A Time.

Karel Green 10:53

laughs Exactly. It was not easy. I think I should also specify here how I had a very different experience in that when I first applied, I applied at the same time as Pruthvi, during my master's year, but I didn't do it properly because again, I was just like, I need to, you know, do my literal masters, I need to finish my project and I need to do my exams, right. So I wasn't really paying that much attention to it. I didn't realize how dire the situation was, with there being you know, hundreds of people applying for what is one or two spaces, things like that. I also at the time was not able to like move out to go to all these other universities, which changed with the following year when I did apply and was actually successful. So I applied only to London unis and didn't get any, didn't even get any interviews. And then the second time

around, I'd like realized what was going on and applied to like 16 different places all across the UK. I've got about half of them being interviews. But um yeah, I was I was worried about getting a lot of random like science questions. And that does happen. Again, the university that I chose in the end because I've got a few offers, but the university I chose in the end was the University of Nottingham. They were really nice because they started off with the interview asking about my research, which is fair enough, like they need to know that you can do research and explain it. Most importantly, you need to be able to actually explain your research to others in a quick and easy way. Because that's the point of doing research. You need to be able to tell the people you're doing it they also asked like about my general interests a lot as well, which I really liked. And later yeah, and then unlike Imperial, just killing you apparently, they did ask me some general astrophysics questions, but the question was something that I had been doing since A -Levels. So it was about orbiting. It was about the moon. It was about the sun. It was about the earth orbiting the Sun. There we go. I'm a scientist. That's what happens. And it's just like, you know, if you want to do a PhD in astrophysics, you need to know what what is going on when the earth is orbiting the sun that no matter which field you want to do, like, that's not something that is, you know, crazy to ask. So that was fine. But yeah, there were definitely some places that were really really rubbish. I remember Leicester, they I did a Skype interview with them because they offered me an interview on the same day, I had an interview on another institution, and it wasn't good. So I was just like, you need to pick different day. And they were like, terrible and could barely work a computer. And I did not like that. Yeah, and other universities had me go around to like each individual lecturer who was offering a project, but never actually formally interviewed me. And that was a huge red flag. But yeah, overall, I'd say that like, I don't think anybody likes applying for PhDs. I don't think anyone would ever say that it was good. Unless they managed to just get one luckily.

Pruthvi Mehta 14:15

So that's a big problem with how nothing to do the application process is standardized. So like for undergraduate applications, you have a UCAS form. But there's no such thing. You know, the application form depends on the institution. Some people want research proposals. Some people don't. Some people don't specify, like, you told me about how a lot of institutions will specify, we want someone with a 2:1 and then in reality only take into consideration people who have a first. You know, #WasteTheirTime2k1

Sehher Tariq 14:53

Sehher and I were actually in an EDI meeting at some point where one of the lecturers at Queen Mary said to our face that, like their entry requirements are a 2:1 with honors, but because they get so many, so many applications, they immediately don't even interview anybody who got less than a First with honors as just an easy way to cull down the number of applications that they get. And this, as we all know, is incredibly problematic with not only the fact that you know, what is the difference between somebody who got 69% and somebody who got 71%, right. But also like the BME attainment gap, which is a major issue, not only in STEM, but just across the board in all of academia.

Yeah, that that me it was pretty terrible. Like that's, but that, honestly, it was such still such a big point of frustration for me because we were giving solutions to them. We told them why don't you make it anonymous? You take away their name for bias reasons, you take away their university because again, there's bias. Like if, if someone's got a first from Cambridge or Oxford, then obviously they're going to go to the forefront.

Karel Green 16:18

Definitely,

Sehher Tariq 16:20

Oxford and Cambridge itself is just, it's privileged. You're privileged when you kind of go there, and I'm not saying like, obviously if you if you go there that you're a bad person, but you will get a lot of opportunities, just with the name of Oxford and Cambridge from that. And they basically just completely shut us down. Like, I would have been happy if they just took away the names but they didn't want to at all. So it's just - it was kind of a hindering progress. There's gonna be BME people who are trying to like fight for something like this, they'll experience a lot of pushback when they come up with a solution. And then the institution will be like, "mmm wellllll no."

Karel Green 17:07

These paper thin excuses. They don't really explain what, why they won't change. They just essentially can't be asked to do so.

Sehher Tariq 17:19

So I think we should start talking about what exactly is hindering people of color actually getting into a PhD. So let's go back to, let's say the advice that you were given. What advice were you given that you feel that wasn't great?

Karel Green 17:47

So I am coming as, again, I said in a previous episode that I'm not one of, I'm the second person in my family to go to university only because I have an older sister right? So I was very, very reliant on universities telling me what to do because I have like no one, nobody else who would like really really know what the process was like until again, I met this random postdoc through sheer luck, who sort of like sponsored me through this process. But what I found really really useless is that universities including the literal careers, you know, section of the university, not just lectures in the physics department told me to like email lecturers in other universities and ask about their projects. And this is like, completely useless. Some lectures will be nice and they will send you like papers to read and whatever. But that's just sort of to like find their own eggs. Because, yeah, usually there's one or two academics who are in charge of the PhD process for each department within the department. Each subfield within the department is what should say. And it's like, it's them and nobody else except for like a couple people on the panel maybe for an interview, like the rest of them have no hands, have no, like, they can't do anything about getting you or not getting you a PhD. And they, it's like essentially all you have to do is just go through the application process there's no outside way. There's no real outside way to get in. But you don't need to waste your time emailing these lectures who can't help you but they don't tell you that they tell you to like to talk to random lecturers - I went to open days I went to PhD open days, those are useless. I would never ever say go to a PhD open day.

Pruthvi Mehta 19:46

They were garbage.

What's even worse than open days, are PhD fairs where you have like random institutions, like representatives for institutions in a big hall, who don't necessarily know anything about the application areas for your subject telling you come here like that's beyond s**t.

I think like another big point that needs to really be brought up is how like this sort of, on one hand yeah like reading their papers and get to know them get them and trying to butter them up doesn't really do anything because you don't know that they're the ones going to be giving you a PhD. But at the same time, like a different way a lot of people use to get in which is socializing with academics right but like it's very much a kind of close knit thing. And let's be honest, they're usually very white, like it's like the people that can do this, that can cozy up to academics, are people who generally you know, you feel you feel camaraderie with people who are look like yourself and you can associate with immediately. And I, you know, I have nothing. I have nothing in common with a 50 year old white male lecturer. I do not, you know, but I'm sure there are people in our courses like, you know, white men and some women who want to, you know, get ahead, etc, who feel like they can. Yeah, and I think, you know, we've mentioned, and we'll talk about it, in like, a bit more detail at some point, but like the fact that a lot of the connections that you need to make in order to you know, get closer to your potential supervisor, all this sort of comraderie/social life stuff happens, you know, involves alcohol and normally takes in a certain place that serves alcohol, like the pub. Pubs are just everywhere in academia, we all know this. And they're ruining everything.

Karl Green 21:53

Exactly, they're so not fun.

Pruthvi Mehta 21:55

Yeah. I can go into them and I obviously don't have to drink but they're still a social barrier you know what I mean? Also, just like talking about my experience with like going to these things like after conferences, after conference parties or whatever they would always happen in pubs and when I say I don't drink I do get a couple of like weird looks generally not from academics but from my white male peers, which I have a lot because of the nature of the job I'm in. But yeah, like it's, it's it's really weird and exclusionary, I think that honestly, like, it may seem like a trivial thing on the surface. But if you're someone who for like, religious reasons, or due to certain disabilities, etc, cannot even like go into a place that serves alcohol or go, go near alcohol you're severely, you know, restricted by the amount of socializing that you can do, which is a really sad thing. I'm probably not wrong and saying that a lot of the socializing does lead to soft like favoritism with regards to PhDs, even if it's not like a direct handover sort of thing.

Sehher Tariq 23:11

Well, I think the favoritism point is like a really, really big thing that does, like bring people into, into like PhDs. So the fact that what we what we have, like seen with our own eyes is that there would be white, white students, kind of making friends with these academics and then ending up with a PhD from that. So you will have like a student who will get really, "we'll have like banter and we'll always talk and be really friendly and even go to the pub with these academics". Yeah, then they'll be like on a first name basis, which I know that all of us find really uncomfortable. If I'm talking to an academic they are "Sir" or "Miss" -

Karel Green 24:12

-or like "Dr" whoever or "Professor" whoever-

Sehher Tariq 24:17

So you call them by their name or whatever, respective, you know, title. But they would be like on the first name basis, and it just seems like they're friends. But we could never get to that we could never get to that level.

Karel Green 24:35

Yeah. And I'd also like to say that it's not always as big as PhD, it's more subtle. It's like, I've heard of people going to like pubs in our undergrad, and the lecturer will just give them the homework answers and these homeworks take literal hours. I can't tell you how many hundreds of hours that we've spent together. Like slaving over our homework. And they'll essentially go to a pub get wrecked, and have the homework answers that they can just write up and get full marks on for that week and not have to do any of the work. Whereas like people who don't go to pubs who tend to more likely be people of color, who have spent the whole week doing what could be an incredibly hard homework, and maybe get, you know, get a majority of them right but not get everything perfect, you know, maybe getting 90% or something. And yeah, that's just one homework. But you think that happens if they even if they go to the pub once a week, you know, once or twice a week, every week for the whole three, four years or in university, that adds up? That adds up to somebody constantly getting 100% versus somebody else constantly getting 90%. And you start to get a deficit and it really does make an impact. It makes a genuine impact on everyone. And yeah, again, it's just it's, it's incredibly exclusionary, incredibly so.

Pruthvi Mehta 25:57

Do you think that perhaps that like like, back in our ancestral motherland's TM we have, you know, like there's a lot more emphasis on teachers and people who provide learning being respected. You know, like, I honestly think if I went to any sort of institution in India, I wouldn't, I wouldn't see people calling their supervisors by their first name. No, there would not be this level of socializing between lecturers and students like you wouldn't, you wouldn't see that because there's that sort of traditional level of respect held for people who provide you with knowledge. That's a very sacred, you know, important thing, think about where I'm from. Do think that's, that's sort of to do with it?

Karel Green 26:53

Yeah, I mean, like, again, just because like nobody in my family has been education the way that I went through education. My parents weren't immigrants. My grandparents were kind of, we're not going into that. But yeah, my grandparents are here. And so my parents were both born here. And they grew up in like the 70s and 80s as black people in England. So, you know, education for them wasn't great, because everybody was racist. And that was that. So like, I'm the first - again so in my family, I, nobody's gone through education, the way that I went through education. So whilst they didn't know, you know, to, they didn't actively say that you've got to, like, be perfect in school or whatever. Like, there was the idea that, you know, just respect your teachers and stuff. Like, that was that was just what was taught to me. And that was fine. And it was just like these it and it was like, my parents were just like, you know, I'm not your friend. I'm your parent and then they were like these aren't your friends, they're your teachers. Even though you know, I'm no longer you know, 14 and being a mess, I don't get told off by my mom anymore as much and that's just like how it's always been. And that's never really changed for me. So again, so then the idea when I got to my masters, and people have become friends of these lectures in what looked to me being overnight, was incredibly like, weird and it was like shocking. I was like "when did this happen?" I was completely blindsided. I was blinking and like squinting trying to work out when all this happened. I think I remembered it once when just in the lecture. I think it was in our solar systems lecture, like somebody called our lecturer, to ask a question, but just called him by his first name. And I was just like, wanting to just collapse. Oh that was bad.

Sehher Tariq 28:57

It was it was advanced cosmology. And that lecturer was also a person of color. Yeah. And, like, I know we're like me and like my group of friends. We had we always called him sir. Yeah. And we we like we have jokes and stuff with him because he was just like the kind of person he could always be really sarcastic. But we had never called him by his first name never. And then all of a sudden, this other person just called him by his first name and all of us were just like "Ummmm, what?" Yes, it was just so shocking. Like it just like you just don't call you just don't call them by their first name because it you have that respect for them.

Karel Green 29:49

Exactly. It's like they've worked hard for that title.

Sehher Tariq 29:52

We thought we had like, a semi friendly relationship with this guy, but we would never go beyond that point by calling them by their first name.

Pranvi Mehta 30:02

Exactly.

A lot of it comes down to especially for us and like our parents mentality, with regards to all this, you know, education is a, it's a privilege, it's not something that you take for granted if it's been given to you make full use of it and be respectful of those that let you have it? Being respectful of your teachers is like one of the most important things to uphold, you know, and it's just like, you, I don't know, maybe this is just a bit of a tangent, but like when you when you look at, like the, the occupations that students in this country, versus students Back Home TM - I remember watching a documentary about this a lot of a lot of Indian schoolchildren were like interviewed and they were asked what you want to do when you're older a lot of them say stuff like, you know, teacher, doctor, you know, like, you know, engineer, whatever, like professions where you can like give your knowledge to others. I remember in this country were like a lot of kids who were interviewed it was like banker, actor, you know, dancer or whatever, like, things which weren't so like academia, related, whatever, like, teacher just never came up, like ever, ever, ever like, and it's because of the way like students to this country to they treat their teachers compared to like, back home. You know, I think that's a that's a big divide there.

Karel Green 31:41

Yes, yes. Um, so, we've talked a lot about like the issues we had in university and stuff, but again, just to reiterate, so why is this a problem? Because that we do say, we said like how people will call lecturers by their first name and how we found it hard to connect with lecturers, and things like that. But like we all did come out with a degree and masters. So a like a lot, a lot of people might be thinking about why is this a problem? But like I said, the beginning, the issue is is that all of these things feed into getting a PhD, the non traditional way should we say atleast? And like, like I said, a PhD is a point in academia, where you go from being like, again, a paying person, so you pay to do a degree, it's 9k a year for somebody who lives in England atleast and you know it could be much more for people in other countries, but you actually get paid a wage. And whilst it's not a good wage, by any stretch of the imagination, you do get money in your bank account, when you do a PhD, if you're fully funded, and this is where the problem comes in, because you hear a lot in the news about how academia is a leaky pipeline. That's what they call it. They call it a leaky pipeline for women and minorities, which is again, problematic because women can be a minority. But there we are.

But it's not a leaky pipeline if people are actively being pushed out, and a lot of the problems and the literal, I'm going to name them the literal EDI team, for the Institute of Physics, cited one of their main concerns being BME parents, telling people not to do a PhD and I would like to talk more about that. And I'd like to hear everyone's thoughts and opinions on that. So what do you think about the idea that it's parents of color, stopping their children from doing a PhD, especially when you look at things like the BMV attainment gap, and how pre University non white students outperform white students across the board, but then it completely flips in university due to implicit biases of what is usually a white lecturer because most lecturers are white in any subjects. So now what are your thoughts and opinions on that?

Pruthvi Mehta 34:22

Um, so just going by like - I was going to talk about my experience because we have brown parents here. And even though one of them so I've mentioned like my dad, who has literally done a PhD, and successfully and you know, that was all fine. My mother and my mother who was present with you know, who was with him while he was doing it. I remember when I told her that, you know, I want to do a PhD. There was initial resistance. There was

initial resistance and I don't know if it's because she saw like, what a hard time like my dad went through when he did his PhD and saw like, how badly he was treated by like, you know, colleagues and how little he earned and I feel like she was just like, you know, are you sure you want to do this but here's the thing when I told her that hey this is a literal job, yeah and I'm earning you know I'm a fair amount of money not as much as you know, my lawyer cousin Anish, who -

Karel Green 34:41

laughs Just name them sure.

Pruthvi Mehta 35:32

Not as much as Anish, you know, I'm not earning like 30k right off the bat. Right, but I am earning. She realized that, okay, you know, this is a job and I'm happy for you. So I think the idea that, you know, black and brown parents are actively, you know, just think that academia is a pipe dream, that it shouldn't be like the main goal of any child and that they should just think about making money. I think that sort of attitude definitely does not address - it doesn't address the problem at all. And in fact, it uses black and brown parents as a scapegoat and tries to undermine the actual institutional racism that is present in universities, which does cause a hindrance to BME students getting a, you know, PhD place. And instead, you know, puts blame on black and brown parents who, you know, if they, if they have these sorts of views, it's really doing it out of, you know, care for their child, and just because they have you know, they don't want their child to go down a root of like, you know, they're not hundred percent invested in and that's not a failing of them. And it's not and it's definitely not the main problem at all, you know, and like I said, once you once you start, you know, treating these PhD applicants, like people who will, who will be earning money who are doing research and deserve a proper wage, then their worries go away. You know, I mean, I at least it was, you know, at least it was for me, I didn't you know, like my mom's completely fine with it now and you know, good.

Sehher Tariq 37:06

With me, my, my parents and like even extended family, they all were saying do do a PhD. Because initially I did want to do a PhD. So like in their head, they were like, okay, she should go "get her dream." And then I came out of university, I graduated, and then I was like, nope, not for me. And then they were saying like, well, why not? They were pushing they were saying, like, just

go and do one like is that it's a good thing to do. So in their head, PhDs are a good thing, to many parents it's a really good thing. It's like, it goes back to the fact that that being academic and having knowledge is such an amazing thing. In our cultures, yes. And that's that's like, for me, this is what I experienced. So I never really had anybody telling me don't do it. The people who are saying don't do it is when I tell them like I don't think I'm going to enjoy it, then they say okay, then don't do it then why are you going to do something you're not gonna enjoy? Exactly.

Pruthvi Mehta 38:19

Yeah, acting like BME parents are some sort of oppressive force like cutting out their kids dreams are completely untrue fact, you know, kind of very, very problematic. And it's very upsetting that when we talk to the Institute of Physics like this was the first go to. It's like, you know, absolutely nothing. Exactly you don't know my parents, you don't know me!

Karel Green 38:42

Yeah, exactly. No, and it's something I especially wanted to bring up and it's I agree basically, with everything you guys said, just want to add to it. So like, I had like a weird sort of half and half in that like my dad, who was born here and grew up here was just like okay Karel, like and this was literally after I just finished my exams like two seconds. I hadn't even, I hadn't even formally graduated, right. That's how quick it was. It was like, okay, time to get a job, blah, blah and I was like okay, I'm looking for one, I just didn't get a PhD. You know, I'm going to reapply next year, he didn't really know what a PhD was, and neither did I, like I was still just being a mess. And so he was really like, get a job, right? And then my mom was more along the lines of like, okay, first of all, give her a break. Like she literally hasn't even formally graduated yet. And also, she was like, okay, but like, you know, if you want to do a PhD, do a PhD, but you need to get a job before you a literal year passes, and you have no money. So that was the big thing. So in my household was about like it was about getting money. And once they realized that I'd get paid to do a PhD, that kind of all went away. Because like I said, my dad grew up here. Whereas my mom was born here but grew up in Jamaica. So she went through like Jamaican education. And again, it's like the idea that these, that it's parents stopping us from doing a PhD is just like it's incredibly mean. I think it's really rude and disgusting, right? My dad's who only got diagnosed with dyslexia, I tell you this literally, literally less than a week ago, did he get diagnosed with dyslexia, went through British education with extreme racism, right? He grew up in an area where him and his family were like, the only blacks anywhere. So he was in a class full of white people. The teachers

wouldn't talk to him, the teachers wouldn't look at him. He, as we know now has dyslexia.

So he was struggling to like read and write, and they wouldn't help him so like this is his experiences of education in the UK, and him and he was extremely successful like he raised be and my sister and my mum and like, he didn't raise my mom but he married my mom and raised a successful family and like, we never went hungry, right. And this was during back when nobody cared about black people. In the UK, everybody was just overtly racist. And the way he did that, was that he, he did school, and he went into college realized that wasn't for him again, the teachers were still garbage, but he got like a trade my entire life, he was a gas engineer. Right? Yeah. And so that's like the idea. So for him, especially, you also say, okay, you need to get a trade because you need to make money so you don't go hungry. And especially the idea, you know, the saying you have to work twice as hard to get half as what they have, especially as a person of color, right? It's like, there's that mentality because it's like, you need to get a trade. You need to start making money now because it's going to take you longer, because it's going to be harder for you to do things. And that that is completely understandable. But the, the idea that like they would stop me from doing a PhD because, you know, they don't want me to do a PhD as opposed to being oh wait no, like, we want our child to not be an unemployed homeless mess, right? is extremely rude and disrespectful in my opinion. And it's like, I don't know what they think happens. Okay, you know, I don't sit down at the computer to apply for a PhD. And my dad does not like bust into my room and slice my fingers off. There is literally - no how, how? Like, what is stopping, - like stabbing me what's up trying to type at the computer is not what happens. phg so the idea that they stop you as opposed to the, you know, centuries of colonialism of the curriculum and favoritism amongst white students. You know, being not being the main cause is extremely extremely rude and just kind of a mess, just a mess for the whole for the whole process.

Pruthvi Mehta 43:10

Yeah like it's it's laughable they think that out of all the things that students of color go through it's our parents who are people we understand you know we've lived with them our entire lives right yeah like to think that we've done so much more that our parents don't want us to do right they really think that our parents going "Umm, are you sure?" will stop us from like filling an application form like we're that weak.

Karel Green 43:36

Exactly, exactly like what kind of mess do you think I am? Like, oh god, it's, it's it's really it's really gross and it's like, they get to get to play that part because again because PhDs are institutionally racist. They get to play that card because you're not likely to get picked for one and then your parents see that oh, my child or this child has applied for a PhD, and they didn't get one, and therefore they didn't get money. So, therefore they shouldn't do a PhD because they're not getting paid. And it's not true. It's not true.

Pruthvi Mehta 44:14

I think what I really want to bring up that I think I forgot earlier, it's just the whole, the whole existence of self funded PhDs. So can we talk about that? Can we talk about how disgusting that is? And how like, severely inaccessible is to working class individuals, and especially, you know, people of color like no way in hell? No, no way.

Karel Green 44:35

So let me let me Can I just start off by saying, I applied to Cardiff University for one of my PhD things. They had an extremely confusing application process compared to other universities. And they didn't have an applying for full funding button. They had a bunch of weird garbage, and it must have turned out that I clicked one that was self funded. I got a call from them, before anybody else replied to me, saying, oh, let's talk more about this PhD, because you clicked the self funded button. And I replied, saying, sorry, I must have clicked the wrong one. And I can't afford to do that. And they were just like, oh, that's fine. We'll put you in with the rest of the "fully funded asking for people". And it won't affect your application. Side note, I didn't get a reply from them. I didn't get an interview from them, how quickly they were willing to come to me the second that I was just like, oh, I'll pay for myself. And you see this all the time: there are times that you apply for PhDs it's usually November, December time you start and the deadlines are usually the end of January, the end of February, depending on the institution. And so many of them who are just like if you are self funded, you can apply any time of the year. If you have money to do a PhD to pay for yourself, just literally email us and we will give you work to do. And that's all well and fine if you were just doing research, but because at the end to get the formal recognition of being a doctor, right, the fact that you can literally buy it is so, so sleazy and bad.

Pruthvi Mehta 46:15

I think I think this ties in with because I think one thing we want to bring up was the fact that a lot of universities bolster like their diversity TM starts by including like, you know that there you know, here here's how many POC we have in department. By hiring like, you know, taking on a lot of international students who have to pay who even if, you know, they do get funding they have, you know, extraordinary PhD fees much, much more than the baseline for students from the UK. And like, in a way, they're still sort of in that I'm like undergraduate phase where they're still paying to like you know work at the institution the university is profiting off of them. So what what may on the surface seem like oh okay they've got a lot of you know, POC or these people of color coming in, really look at whether what percentage of the BME in that institution that are doing a PhD, are international students, okay because they they pay a lot. They pay a lot more to the university in order to be there and basically remember because I have a flatmate who is from the University of Liverpool's sister university in China. And he was talking about how the fees are so so much. He doesn't even know if he'll get full funding. There's a companion that when he does graduate with a PhD, he has to go back to his home country to work there for at least three years. And there's just - we could do a whole other thing on how, you know, there's a lot of barriers facing international students in terms of, you know, getting their work published and recognized in a Western institution. Right. Yeah. But and I'm not saying I'm not saying that they're, they're massively privileged in any way. But the fact is that there's a dire lack of focus on homegrown, you know, diversity. You have to make sure when you're looking at the BME stats, that that if you look at the percentage of students are homegrown and are based in the UK, right?

Karel Green 48:33

Yeah. The with because just to reiterate, you don't get paid a wage if you are an international student, you pay to go there. Whereas if you are a fully funded PhD student, you work for them and they pay you money for your work. If you're an international student, you work for them and you also give them money to work there as an international student and so the idea that they gain not only money, but labor as well. Whereas, if they have a person of colour from the country that the university is in, they only gain the labor, they lose money from their bank account because they're paying you to work for them.

Pruthvi Mehta 49:11

And here's the thing exactly like it's a net loss. But even if they do have some funding from back home or from like a grant, or whatever, it's not gonna be anywhere near enough to match their university fee. So yeah, it's still it's still a net loss.

Karel Green 49:25

Exactly. Exactly. And there's this, there's two, there's two things I'd say. So first of all, a lot of universities will take in Chinese students because China has what I would call, I don't know if I'd call it good, but I'm glad it exists anyway. Where they, where they pay for a lot of their students to go to universities, and they'll give a university, the university fees for their students do a PhD there, and they'll give them a certain amount of money to live. And from what I've heard, it's not a lot of money, but it does exist. And that's how a lot of universities get their BME statistics from. Queen Mary had a sister University in China, the University of Nottingham has one in China and University of Liverpool has one in China. So, you know, I wonder where all of these, you know, non white people are coming from.

And the thing is that this does create a class barrier, because well, first of all, like there are other people come from other countries, you know, it's not just China. But again, China's the only place that has this scheme. And there are statistics and we will find the official web page for this where it proves it but we have a reference for this and it will be in the show notes, where of all BME students, homegrown and international, who are doing a PhD in any field. Chinese is the most common because of that reason. And, and this does create a class barrier because even though some Chinese students are able to work in the UK. And that in itself is not an issue right, people can go where they want, if they are able to, you know, that's not the problem here. The problem is that, you know, there are poor people in China - not everybody can afford to do that. And the people in China, well, they stay at home in China, you get a PhD in China. Yeah. But the poor people in England or the UK, or whichever country you're in, that is not China. You can't afford to move to another country to do PhD, and do not have a random scheme that allows you that gives you enough money to move, don't get positions, because you have the BME attainment gap and institutionalized racism, which means that they're not likely to get the paid positions compared to a white boy from Oxbridge. And then you have all of these other non white, usually, like I said, Chinese but not exclusively Chinese people who are able to pay for themselves, you know, whether it be they're fine or they're barely scraping by. And they're bolstering up the BME statistic. And then like all of

the homegrown VME people who want to do a PhD, but can't literally just don't get one. And then that's the end of that.

Pruthvi Mehta 52:14

It's terrible. Like I think, my main takeaway from self-funded PhDs, is that if you are literally wealthy enough to do a self-funded PhD right and you know that you will secure funding or get a secure allocation of money from which you can pay for your PhD like you should you know, don't take up a funded place from someone who is not as well off as you, that may be kind of like a strict rule and like kind of harsh but like, sticking to my socialist principles, if you can pay your way through it, then you can pay your way through it, right. Don't take the place of someone who cannot.

Karel Green 52:51

Yeah, I mean that. There's also like there's the UK has come out with the PhD loan which in my opinion, extremely unethical. Cause you get paid between 14 and 16 k per year depending on if you're inside or outside of London in the UK, right for PhD. So say you take like 14 K, that's 28 k in two years. So the whole PhD loan is 25,000 pounds, right? And that's all you can get maximum and then out of that you have to give the university 4000 pounds a year to even work there, right? Fully funded people don't have to give the - like the tuition fees are already taken out of the funding. So when I say if you're outside of London, when you take when I say you take home 14,000 I mean, that's what you literally get. You don't have to give them 4000 back, you literally just get 14,000. So the PhD loan in itself is already useless. It's not enough. There's nothing to live on. You'd have to get a job on top of doing what somebody else is already getting paid for, like the idea that somebody has to work whilst somebody else is getting paid to do the same amount of labor is already in itself just like a red flag, but it's like hmm, this ain't it. This ain't it, sis.

Pruthvi Mehta 54:09

I can't I can't remember like the like, how much you have to pay back like the repayment on that they must be horrific considering that we already have about 60 you know, k? Who the hell is gonna live long enough to pay off their PhD loan? Like, it's a ridiculous thing to implement.

Sehher Tariq 54:33

It's like, it's just a massive culture now in academia, the fact that every student is going to be in debt. So we're already in debt. We've got we've got our debt from our undergraduate, undergraduate degree and then Pruthvi you did a separate masters, right?

Pruthvi Mehta 54:53

Yeah.

Sehher Tariq 54:56

You've got like, a debt from that. And then if you got a PhD loan on top of that there's debt from that. So like you're going to be depending on like what kind of loans you get, you're going to be in debt. You could be in debt over 100. k. Yeah.

Pruthvi Mehta 55:15

Yeah, a PhD loan could easily push you over 100k, that's really disgusting and terrifying.

Karel Green 55:20

Especially with the state of getting a job after a PhD. Like that's scary.

Pruthvi Mehta 55:24

Yeah. Scared myself. Thank you.

I think the final point that we have a few points you want to bring up - do you guys have any opinions on the lack of entrance points and like the, we've mentioned the accessibility in terms of cost, like the idea of if you start doing stuff in academia, and then you leave it for whatever reason, either health issues or money issues or whatever. You go and go find a stable job, which isn't in an academic field, the idea that you don't have the ability to come back, it's literally just not - I've never heard about it? Don't know anyone who's left academia and been able to come back successfully and continue up the ladder. Yeah, that's not something I've heard off. So what are your guys' opinions on that?

Karel Green 56:12

I agree. So first of all, career progression just doesn't exist. And that's so scary to think about considering going into this field. Also how brutal it is and penalizing people for even just being sick. Or it's like God forbid somebody goes and works in Primark or something to pay their bills, and then you get penalized for that as opposed to university being like, "Oh wait, why is this person who could clearly be doing what they want to do as a research scientist working in retail to pay their bills why aren't we just paying- why aren't we covering that as part of their wage", like that's a mess. I also don't like how you essentially you have to get a PhD before you can just be a scientist, right? Like you get paid doing a PhD but like we said 14,000 pounds is a lot London living wage is about 24,000 pounds a year, right? Again, not everybody lives in London but 10k is still a big difference. So you're not getting a lot of money. And the idea that somebody has to go through primary school, then secondary school, then their GCSEs then college and their A-Levels then University and get a degree, then on top of that more University get a masters and then get a PhD and then complete it before they just get a job being a research scientist is massively exclusionary, because that's over 20 years of education. Which not everybody has. And people are really sick, like I left my degree my integrated Master's right, in the worst physical health I've ever been in in my life. I had major symptoms from severe illness that I actually ignored for over a year, because I didn't have time, I had homework, I had exams, I literally day to day, I did not have time for a GP appointment, something that is 20 minutes long. And it is massively massively a huge problem that there is no access points, or that people can't just get an apprenticeship or do a three year degree, and then have a way to become a scientist outside of getting a Masters and PhD. And that's just it's, it's really, it's really, really gross.

Pruthvi Mehta 58:33

I went to a conference recently and I talked with another academic who's a postdoc. And he told me about how, like so postdocs have like those separate issues with regards to the fact they're not being paid that much at all, but they're in the period of life where they want to be like settling down and having a family right, so yeah, so this man who's in his 30s is originally from South Korea, is married to his wife and has been married for a while, and ideally would really, really like what children, he told me that he can't even possibly, you know, think about a possibility until he gets a more stable job. A postdoc isn't a stable job you're being shunted around from university to university, you don't know where the next paycheck is coming from. And

30,000 is nowhere near enough to like raise, like, you know, a family , especially in this day and age, you know, especially if it's just the one person who's working. It's really stressful the way postdocs are treated. I think it's disgusting, the postdoc is a very, you know, they have a lot of work in terms of not only are they quite, they're going, they're going around doing their own research, they are the main bridge to PhD students, I think I think a lot of us will have, you know, a primary supervisor who is a professor and who doesn't really know anything about anything that's going on in terms of our actual day to day work, right, because you have so many people to supervise and postdocs have like they, they have that link with a PhD student, and they are constantly mentoring them while doing all the same duties that the, you know, Professor might be doing. So, you know, there's a very there's lack of infrastructure for them as well, and it's just it's really bad. Yep.

Karel Green 1:00:17

Yep, definitely, definitely agree.

Sehbar Jang 1:00:20

So, I wanted to go back to the point of not becoming a scientist until you've done a PhD. So if I had the choice of doing science and doing research without having to do PhD, then that would have been definitely what I would have gone and done after my masters. But I'd have to do another three years of education that was just such a put off to me, because I already had my master's year was probably the most stressful year of my degree, and like, rightfully so it was my last year you do get a high workload and stuff like that, but the fact that what I've heard from PhD is that it's essentially that kind of intensity all the way through. I would not have been able to cope with that. So if I had the choice to do research and do something that I was very interested in, but I didn't necessarily I don't care about getting, getting a qualification to say, I've done the research, like it's just a job for me, then I would have done that straightaway. So, and if something comes out like that, like I know, there's there's Research Assistants and Research Associates, I think you can do that without having a PhD, but most the time they say, you have to be working towards your PhD to be Research Assistant.

Karel Green 1:01:49

I don't even how does that work?

Pruthvi Mehta 1:01:51

Yeah what is the point?

Karel Green 1:01:52

I'm doing a PhD I don't need - why would I be a research assistant? I'm barely alive doing a PhD. Like

Sehher Tariq 1:01:59

Yeah so like, What I've seen on adverts is it will say, we need a research assistant for this research project. And then it will say, and you will be on track to complete your PhD. So it'd be something that I was interested in. And I'd be like, oh, I'd love to do some research on that. And then it'd be like a decent salary or I might be like, mid 20k, like 25k or something like that. And then it would say you have to work towards your PhD. And then I'm like, Okay, well, that's not for me. So it was a role like that. But I could genuinely just be a research assistant that I would be fully happy to do something like that. But there just isn't any opportunity unless I want to go in be a scientist with a big company, but that isn't necessarily what I want to research.

Karel Green 1:02:51

Yeah. I'd also say, it's not even easy to find, like because it's not a standard thing within the sector. Those jobs aren't even look easy to find. I've just had like a quick Google. And it's like it's not. It's not always obvious, right? And that's like another thing, it's like they should just make that something standard across the board. So again, if somebody wants to do a PhD, they can they but if they don't want to use that particular route, and they're just like, I don't mind, I just want to do some research, that that should be open to people, because they want the labor. There is like to this, this is something like, again, I feel like university should fund more PhD spots themselves, and not just us, like funding from funding bodies. I don't know how it works if they're even allowed to, but I think they should. And I don't see the reason why they wouldn't, right. There's like two or three PhD spots. And not only are there hundreds of people applying to them, but there are like every single academic will have a project that they want research on, not just two or three of them. Everybody in the department will have a project that they're just like, Oh, I could use a PhD student to do this, this and this. They're getting data all the time and they want the help. That's why it's so many universities take in my 10/20 international students to just do the work for them they need

this help. So the idea of literally getting more labor which they are they seem to be asking for, and but not like actually doing that is really strange, in my opinion,

Pruthvi Mehta 1:04:23

It is gross. I really don't like this idea of PhD being a stepping stone to tap devia when you've already done so much, and so many people can't really attain it like it's -

Karel Green 1:04:34

Yeah, like you said the travel and the stuff like know that postdoc you were talking about who has a liberal family can't be traveling all the time because he needs to keep his child alive if he ever has one. Like, it's not it's not. It doesn't let people live a life.

Pruthvi Mehta 1:04:53

That's insane. I mean, look up most professors, people who've been in the field like 30/40 plus years, they don't have personalities or lives anymore. Yep. Where are they? They're gone.

Karel Green 1:05:08

Scalped all professors ever. Love it.

So, um first thing I would say is that if you if you are offering PhDs with a certain entry requirement, you should buy rights interview every single person who satisfies that entry requirement. There is literally no difference between somebody who got 69% and somebody who got 71% right. So the difference between, especially on boundaries of degree levels is just like completely arbitrary, like God forbid somebody you know, has a head cold one month and somebody else doesn't that should not impact their entire lives. The other thing is that need to take into, take into account extenuating circumstances more. I know a lot of people who are too just as smart as me, if not smarter, but happened to be born with an illness that affects their lives. And they should also be like, have the exact same number of like opportunities and interviews as anybody else for these positions, because again, can't penalize or you shouldn't penalize because they do. People having life that happens,

like things happen, people lose family members, people, like lose where their home is, you know, it rained the other day, and all of the Midlands flooded, like somebody is homeless, like instead of just looking at a pure number and saying this person who got a first- we'll interview this person who got a first from Oxford or Cambridge, you should actually take the time to go through these lists that you actively advertise for and actually evaluate the circumstances that have allowed these people to get into these positions right? I'm not impressed. I'm not impressed by anybody who got first from Oxford or Cambridge because I know that they haven't had any kind of like - anything go wrong. Right? So that's that.

Pruthvi Mehta 1:07:11

Yeah, we could literally do a whole episode on like, a elitism in institutions. And so I honestly think Oxford or Cambridge are like, the highest, the highest example of something like this because their name like resonates throughout the world as being the best and I think that's really just exclusionary in itself, but like, that's another thing for another day. So I think, you know, another thing we want to like, talk about is the fact that a lot of, so I've mentioned before before the idea that a lot of academia is centered around drinking and how that affects you know, what positions or places people might get as a result of it. Um, get we need activities in academia, we need social activities in academia, whether it be physics societies will see of Stanford or something, any sort of student, student led or student guided activities which isn't centered around drinking, you know, because I'm just talking about our own experience of Queen Mary University of London. I'm just gonna shame them continuously.

Karel Green 1:08:14

It's what they deserve, their entire physics apartment is collapsing, so it's fine.

Pruthvi Mehta 1:08:19

We know that we do.

Sehher Tariq 1:08:21

It's not just them as well. It's like it's a physics wide problem. Yes

Pruthvi Mehta 1:08:30

I don't know much about it at Liverpool because they're all blocked. The one at QMUL was like pub crawl after pub crawl.

Karel Green 1:08:42

They were getting funding for that.

Pruthvi Mehta 1:08:46

Yeah, so basically have activities that aren't centered around drinking and we need to put caps on like the amount of people, the amount of funding people, people in the societies and higher ups get to spend on alcohol and also also anything to do with like after parties for conferences, dinners for conferences, always be aware of like not having like alcohol present because you don't know who you're excluding.

Karel Green 1:09:10

I mean, like, I wanted to express it express that I somebody like, I can drink if I want to. I don't have any physical or religious barriers to doing so I'm just a person who doesn't drink and I will say this till the day I die. The only reason I don't drink is because it tastes like garbage. Okay, I will guzzle down Fanta and that end my life in the same amount that a beer would but I'm not drinking some gross barley water. And that's that on that right. And I, as somebody who can literally drink if I want to, like my dad enjoys beers daily. My sister drinks if she wants to, my mom drinks if she wants to. It's literally okay. Like every - I like the amount that people drink. But it's not only extremely exclusionary to other people who don't drink, whether it be like me because they don't want to or they literally can't because they'll die from illness or religious reasons. Right? But it's like this - nobody who drinks that much is okay. They need to have a little look and see why is everybody guzzling down so much beer and wine? Well, not only can we not be included, they're not okay! These people - like this is an anti social behavior, right? Pruthvi has somebody in her office who's had literal gout *dissolves into laughter*

Pruthvi Mehta 1:10:34

Yeah, okay, so for listeners who don't know, and you won't unless Gout Boy is listening, we'll call him Gout Boy okay? Gout Boy is in my department, he sits next to me. He's like a mature student, he's like 27. He got gout at age 23.

Okay, I want you to know that he got gout at 23. Who the hell gets gout at 23 I want to know. Yeah, and then continues drinking the same amount if not worse, and then tells me to my face to my brown face, he tells me, he tells me, oh, alcohol has nothing to do with gout. I literally looked on my phone showed him the NHS web page on gout, showing him that it was caused by excessive drinking. Have you was like, oh, lol, whatever. I was crying.

Karel Green 1:11:24

Nobody who does that is okay.

Not only is it wasting so much money, but everybody is depressed, if they're all drinking that amount. Nobody even cares about the white boys from Cambridge who are drinking themselves to death. And that is a scary thought if they don't care about the whites what hope is there for any of us

Pruthvi Mehta 1:11:49

And like so basically, I think I think just to get one solution, it will never never be implemented, but whatever we need. Active mental and physical health checks at an academic level.

Karel Green 1:12:09

Gout Boy if you're listening please drink less.

Pruthvi Mehta 1:12:14

Please drink less for for Karel's sake look she's dying everyone

Karel Green 1:12:17

My eyes Oh my god oh my god

So I also, outside of inside of PhD so outside of the PhD I think it's common practice now that like your project grades which are the main like your main point of research the first research you really do, right in your masters at least you can't like challenge the grade on that because it and this goes into like the BME attainment gap and how again like there's so much bias that there's

a literal trend that just non white people are just getting marked down unconsciously by every white lecturer ever apparently. And it's like, that is a big thing. And I think universities need to think of a way and maybe again get projects to be marked externally. So, that way you remove the bias because we literally know it works because this the BME attainment gap does not exist below University. So A levels GCSEs there is no attainment gap, it does not exist, right. So we know that that works. So if the things and also the stats say that it's worse in the arts compared to the sciences, so sciences, you know, if the answer is seven, and you get seven on the exam, you get the mark, right? So that shows that it's a bias with how they think about these people's work. But people there needs to be like they they need to first of all, they need to allow students, all students not just the BMV ones, the white ones as well if they wish to, to formally challenge like project grades, and things like that, because that can help close the BME attainment gap because my project grade stopped me from getting a first by less than 2%. So I'm not bitter but I knew it would have worked for me, and I'm sure it would have worked for, you know, thousands of others who are suffered from the same pitfalls I did.

So we were talking about how useless PhD and graduate fairs were right. Yeah, I think one way we could actually make them less useless is by like, especially with regards to getting more BME into PhD and beyond. It's getting POB academics whether they're like PhD students or post docs who are BME even getting them into the into like the graduate fairs and the PhD fairs and into other institutions, about the experiences about applying for a PhD, or whatever, talking about how they, how they possibly tackled the entire process, I think that will build a lot of links with, you know, undergraduate, BME students who are thinking about applying. And again, like I said, representation is very important. If you see someone who looks like yourself who talks like yourself, you know, doing it, right, yeah, talking about how they've done it, you will feel like you can, it's, you know, it's something that, you know, you feel like there's a way there for you, you know what I mean.

Exactly, I think it makes it easier, especially because it's like the idea is that say if we went to a white academic, we'd have to work out ourselves how to deal with being a person of color going through this. Whereas like, that's an extra step that other white people don't have to do. Whereas if we saw - if I was talking to a person of color, they would already implicitly just in their own experience, because they would have gone through it themselves, know how to do it as a person of color, and that's just another extra step, you don't have to do..Like trying to work out what the barriers are and how to overcome them, as opposed to just be in total. But because that's the that's the point, not only do like white students not have these barriers, they get the

whole answer. Whereas we have barriers and we don't get the entire answer. And that would be, and again, in getting advice from other people of color into these places would be a way to remove that. And again, shameless plug, we have a whole guide on how we did it. So if you're a woman of color, protheans Indian, I am black. I'm Jamaican, so that we cover all the people of color, except for that the next people, so I'm sorry, you can just suffer on your own I guess. But everyone else?

Pruthvi Mehta 1:16:45

And East Asian.

Karel Green 1:16:46

And Polynesian and anybody who isn't Indian or Jamaican? Yeah.

With, you know, British accents, being born in England, but everybody else except for you guys - *laughs*

Pruthvi Mehta 1:17:08

Basically, it's a good guide, ignore whatever that was, please read it.

Karel Green 1:17:16

Free download on our website - Love that sold it a million pounds in my bank account and -

Pruthvi Mehta 1:17:25

So proud of you!

Karel Green 1:17:26

I'm so happy.

So okay in terms of again going back into PhD actually referencing taking the time out to formally cite the research done by people of color is really

important. There have been studies that show that people of color get systematically get cited less than white people and this all feeds into career progression because one of the main things they look at is like, oh, what research has he done? How much is it been cited? You know when they're looking to hire somebody. And I just also think that it's insane that the human being could do four years of research essentially, and never once cite somebody who isn't white as a first author, that's the most important part they need to be a first author of the paper. It's insane.

Pruthvi Mehta 1:18:20

I was talking to someone on the EDI committee who, who you know, even though they were just really blind at like, recognizing a lot of things, even they were just like, hey, I work in condensed matter. And one of the biggest names in condensed matter, especially with regards to like spectral lines and stuff, it's C. V. Raman, who did a lot of work with spectroscopy. And he was like a condensed matter physicist, Indian condensed matter physicist in like the 1900s. So yeah, know things. Anyway, they they're really fundamental work their work is really fundamental. And they're like a pioneer philosophy in this in this field. And yet they're barely cited. They're like barely cited and he was like, it's weird how people will cite works that cite Raman instead of citing Raman, you know what I mean, and you've got to think about why that is, people with such significance would normally have so many citations like, it's like people not citing the people in which you know, Higgs proposed the Higgs boson. Right? Like that. It's that level of, you know, big impact physics and yet, a lot of people for whatever reason, aren't citing it.

Karel Green 1:19:30

Yeah. And if you are wondering, oh, who am I going to cite? I only know you know, the Newton and Einstein, blah, blah, listen to our future episodes. Yeah, we talk a lot about this, especially the next one decolonizing the curriculum, Episode Three, and we will explain the entire reason that is and why is essentially BS, and there is no excuse. So go forth. And look for somebody who isn't white. I am telling you they exist. And you will find them, because we found them with our brown eyes, we looked and we saw it, and it will be fine, your paper won't burst into flames. You won't actively melt in front of your computer, you will literally be completely fine. So that is something that everybody at any stage can really do. And it makes all the difference. Finally, essentially we're saying, as we were saying before, actively looking to your statistics for not only who you hire career progression for non white academics, because again, if you're only getting your BME statistics from international students. It means you've gone literal years without actually

paying somebody who isn't white to work for you and that's messed up, it's usually in their contract that these people have to literally go back home to their original countries after they're done with their PhD. So then you're left with your two white boys from Oxbridge and that's not representation, so actively look at your actual statistics for who works for you like who you actually pay. And if it's a white, do something about it, because that's not an accident. Okay, that's systematic racism sweetie. Okay?

We always do a media recommendation at the end of our episodes. This is in a way to help stop burnout, which you hear about a lot. Because you should always be putting yourself first and trying not to die in the horrific mess that is academia. So we all have recommendations for this week. Who wants to go first?

Pruthvi Mehta 1:21:34

I'll go first. So I've been I've recently started playing game called Stellaris. So it's basically a grand strategy game where you can play as a race and, you know, if you're a person of color, you get to be the coloniser this time.

Karel Green 1:21:56

Wow.

Pruthvi Mehta 1:21:59

Build a galactic empire fight with fleets etc. I think, you know, the main thing that really drew me in and like made me want to play it for a while - the main thing that I really liked about it is that you know how when you like auto generate names and like faces and stuff in like character design, there's normally whole bit about that in the beginning of the game. Normally just like stereotypical white features on white people with white names, you know, I mean, this actually has, like, if you if you'd like, do the random name generator, you'll have like a POC sounding name, right, you'll have a, you'll have a POC sounding name. And you'll have like a, you have a proper like, you can have proper dark skinned, humanoid design. It's, it's, it's a good it's a good fantasy game. It's not like a direct like implementation of POC or their work, or whatever. But I just think it's a nice thing to like, play a nice thing to like see this sort of indirect representation. It's very subtle. But it's there. I think it's quite nice.

Karel Green 1:23:02

Yeah, I think it sounds lovely too.

Sehher Tariq 1:23:09

Okay, so mine's not as good as that.

Karel Green 1:23:14

Um, I'd say it's better actually.

Sehher Tariq 1:23:20

But I would like to recommend The Sims because you can do whatever the heck you want. So I always make Asian characters, South Asian characters just because that is me. And I'd like I'd rather play someone who looked like me. And I've made black families, and I just don't like a lot of games, the default is white, and I don't want to do that. And the Sims lets you play as whoever you want, you can even play someone green. So yeah, I'd recommend The Sims.

Karel Green 1:23:59

I like to say that in The Sims, you can be any kind of LGBT plus. And that's also like, makes everything better. So definitely descenders. So, I'm going to recommend The Sims but also, I'm going to recommend this author who I've recently started reading just any of her work. Her name is Alyssa Cole. And essentially, I like her because she is a black woman, and I'm reliving my teenage years, where all I would read was like you know, the Hunger Games and divergent and whatever, because those were like the best selling books. And those were telling me a story about how a white girl has gone through so much because she's had such a hard life, but she's the chosen one. And then she gets to go on this huge adventure and not kill the game. And essentially, I'm just reliving that through Alyssa Cole. She writes about, first of all it's adult fiction and now that I'm an adult, I don't want to read like cringy 16 year olds doing stuff. I want to read about cringy 25 year olds doing stuff. She writes about that. And she also and the main characters, are always just black women. I'm a black woman. So clearly I have to like her work. And it's true. I do. And her characters, you know, do loads of stuff, and there's loads of

ethnic diversity. And the main guy was not even always a guy, but they're not always black. However, sometimes they're white. Sometimes they're Chilean. And sometimes they're whatever, and it's just really nice to see me represented. So I'm the chosen one that I saved the day, but I also have braids and dark skin. So anything by Alyssa Cole, he's never written a bad word in her life is a good read. So that's who I would recommend but also be 18 Plus, because it's adult fiction. So no kids.

Pruthvi Mehta 1:25:40

Kids are blocked.

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