

Name Key:

J: Dr. Jenna Zajac

M: Maria Ayoub

Kh: Khadija El-Karfi

Ki: Kiloni Quiles-Franco

[intro plays]

[0:33] M: Hey everyone. I'm Maria Ayoub

J: -and I'm Jenna Zajac.

M: And you're listening to Vitamin PhD.

J: So today, very exciting. Uh, we wanted to introduce our new hosts who will be taking over this next season of Vitamin PhD. So we have with us today, Kiloni and Khadija.

[0:49] M: Yes. Welcome to Vitamin PhD. We are really excited to chat with you today and to pass along the podcast torch. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and your academic backgrounds?

[0:59] Kh: Yeah. Thank you so much for having us. Um, so hi everyone. My name is Khadija El-Karfi. Um, just a little bit about myself, I'm an international student from Morocco and I'm also a second year PhD student in the romance studies department. So my PhD is about French and Francophone, uh, literature and studies. Um, I was here in the US for about six years now. I went to undergrad at Mount Holyoke College, which is a women's college and it was such a great experience and such a great community. So when I heard about this opportunity, I was really excited to connect with Kiloni and do this podcast and, you know, just get to know a lot of people around.

[1:39] Ki: Hello everyone. My name is Kiloni Quiles-Franco. I'm a third year molecular and translational medicine PhD student on the medical campus. I'm a born and raised Massachusetts resident, or as we call it a "Mass Hole", but I am very, very passionate about the topic that we'll be talking about this season.

J: Nice. Very cool. You guys have awesome backgrounds, I love it. So speaking of next season, can you give us a little tease of what is coming up?

[2:09] Ki: So I would say that the inspiration for this seasons' guests was stemmed by the events of the George Floyd murder.

[2:21] Kh: You know, like you all noticed BU has been very involved in trying to start conversations about the reality of you know, how minorities and black people live in the United States. And we thought, you know, it was important to kind of like see where we are right now and how we can take those conversations and actually implement that change. So like we wanted to talk to people that have been doing this work for so long and kind of like get their input on what's the next step, who wanted to help our listeners get the tools that they need to, you know, get involved within the BU community, but also like outside of BU.

[2:59] Ki: One of the approaches that we took was trying to focus on actionable items. We felt that, post George Floyd, most people had been focused primarily on feelings, which has its own platform and is important in it's own right. But there didn't seem to be a lot of next steps. There didn't seem to be a lot of options and information for advocates and allies to know what to do or how to become an ally. And there didn't seem to be a lot of resources that were publicly available for the BU community on where to seek out support if you were in some way affected or traumatized by the culture that the George Floyd event kind of elucidated for the United States. And then further the globe, right? Cause that ended up causing a global movement, which was exciting to see. So something that we focused on with speaking with a diverse group of guests, we focused on not just students, but faculty as well. We made great efforts to try to get at least a student and a faculty member on each episode, um, ask them the same questions so we could really map out what the different perspectives were on each of these topics and how each group in the BU community felt that we could make some actionable and tangible steps to improve that culture at Boston University.

[4:29] Kh: Yeah and I feel like that's why for the first episode, we kind of, like, focus on like the question, what would make you care, or like, why do you need to get involved in these conversations or these actions? And the reason for that is we wanted to interview student groups and see what they were doing and how their experience has been and what has worked and what did not work while also, I feel like from the conversations that we had is that like change can be very slow, but it's still important for students and faculty and everyone in the community to get involved. Even if it, you know, during your time change may not take place, but it is important for people that come after you.

[5:07] M: For sure, for sure. This is fantastic. I am really excited to listen to your episodes. Such a great topic to take on, and I, I like your approach as well as having a student and a faculty and asking them [the] same questions, trying to get multiple perspectives, focusing on diverse groups as well. That's super important. And as well as actionable items, I think, I think that's where most people left off. There was a lot of talk and nowhere to go. And I think that, um, this podcast is going to be a great platform for you guys to be able to spread what people can actually do, what works, what doesn't. So I'm really looking forward to listening to that. That's great.

[5:44] Ki: Something we also did was try to pull from the feedback that we had received prior to the episodes from, uh, colleagues, faculty members, and our own departments and our experiences within them to try to see what the major obstacles seem to have been. So I can only speak from the medical campus and my limited experience on that campus, but something that we've been struggling with is diversity. It seems like we get a pretty decent amount of applicants, but not a lot of matriculation of people of color. And so we're really trying at all levels, students and faculty alike, are really trying to right that ship, but it's hard to do so when an individual as an applicant doesn't see themselves represented in a space. So no matter how earnest and, and genuine you are about your efforts, it's- it's tough to get over that- that barrier. And so we were really trying to interview people to see how we can get to that level, um, on the medical campus.

[6:44] J: I know we- we struggle to have a diverse sample in our research and it's like, how do we reach, you know, other participants, other communities. And it also comes back to on our websites, on our flyers are running out, like representing everyone that makes them feel included when we're trying to recruit, you know, other participants as compared to having the same individuals on everything.

[7:06] Kh: The great thing about this, you know, episode and working with Kiloni is that I was able to learn a lot of things that I did not know about that, you know, were happening on the other side of campus. Uh, but we also were talking about, you know, how there are so many opportunities and resources for students and faculty, and sometimes it's just hard or like it can get lost because there's so many, so much out there. So it was, it was nice to be able to talk to different student works and like different faculty members hear about those resources. And we hope that, like, our listeners are going to listen to them and get encouraged to either reach out to those people or kind of get involved. So that was really great.

[7:47] Ki: I think what was pretty eye-opening was two things that I took away from it. One was that I would say that Khadija and I both have a pretty strong passion in the topic, and yet almost every episode we were hearing about a resource or some sort of- some sort of benefit as a, as a member of the BU community that we did not know about. And I would say, uh, another thing that I kind of was faced with was the fact that even though I consider us to be a diverse community and consider me to be pretty open-minded, I was not prepared for the stories that our guests were telling me as well. I had my own implicit biases, so that in and of itself was a lesson for me.

[8:30] Kh: Yeah and I think for me, like being an international student and being a minority, like sometimes you think, I don't know, you've experienced it all, but like hearing different stories, it's like, "Oh, like, wow, like there's so much out there". But also the other thing that I learned from this experience was how willing people were to help and talk to us and, you know, share their experiences and their resources with the hopes that like it was going to help someone else. Um,

but I was so glad to be part of this experience and kind of like get to know my community here at BU and get to connect with them and, you know, it just, it felt really great.

J: That's really fantastic. And I'm looking forward to hearing about those resources, cause I'm also pretty invested in the topic.

M: What about takeaways?

[9:14] Kh: I think for me the biggest takeaway from our conversations, especially with, you know, professors and faculty members and professionals was that it was great to hear about their stories and to hear about, you know, maybe that they experienced similar things that we are going through right now and seeing how- what lessons they learned from their experiences. And it was kind of like eye opening to be like, there's a way forward or there's like ways for improvements and ways for things to get a little bit better.

[9:48] Ki: I completely agree. I would say one of the takeaways that I got from this episode was that there is no one thing that every department or every faculty member, or even just BU as a whole needs to do. Um, it's... we knew it wasn't going to be a quick fix, but it definitely felt like going into this, I was hoping for a more tangible list of items that we could just present and say, here we go, this is what needs to be done. And the more episodes we did, the more we realized, um, how much change needs to come from every individual member of the BU community as a whole, it needs to be a community wide investment. And it really does need to be emphasized on a regular basis.

[10:35] M: I think it's hard when we kind of live in this culture of instant gratification. We're looking for things to immediately change or immediately be available to us. And when it's something that requires such deep, deeply rooted change, um, it can be frustrating when you don't see that immediate change when you don't see people thinking the same way as you yet. Um, but I, I agree. It has to be a community effort and something that we're all dedicated to.

Ki: Well, thank you for having us.

Kh: Thank you.

M: Yes. We love talking to you. This was great.

J: Yeah. We're really excited to listen to their season. I'm sure it's going to be great. And you have a lot of awesome things in store.

Ki + Kh: Yes. Thank you.

[outro plays]