

The Conch Sz1Ep3- ImaniBlack.mp3

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:04] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov and I'm the host of this podcast, The Conch. We are cruising along in our journey with this podcast, talking about seafood and the ocean. And most importantly, we're showcasing some of the incredible women working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, examining the challenges they face, and the triumphs they've achieved. Today, I'm so excited to welcome someone I've been cheering on for a long time, Imani Black! Imani is the founder and CEO of Minorities in Aquaculture or MIA for short. She's a student, an oyster farmer, and represents a long legacy of watermen in her family dating back to the 1800s. Welcome and thank you, Imani, for joining me today on the call. Let's get started.

Imani Black [00:00:48] Yes. Thank you so much for having me, Julie.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:51] I'm really, really, really excited to talk to you and you are super busy. So I really want to thank you in advance for taking time out of your busy day to chat with me.

Imani Black [00:01:00] Yeah, absolutely. I mean, this podcast is great and I have been very looking forward to having a full conversation with you because like we said before we started, we've only talked on IG live.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:11] Yeah. And we weren't even really talking with each other. We were talking to the IG live, I guess.

Imani Black [00:01:17] Yeah. Yeah. Talking into the abyss.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:19] Yeah. So I'm really happy to have you on here. So I wanted to kind of start, you know, our journeys in the nonprofit world are pretty similar in the fact that we've both started our nonprofits at the same time. So I started SAGE, Seafood and Gender Equality, kind of building it in the summer of 2020. And I think you did the same. And I'd love to hear, in your words, a little bit more about, you know, how did you start MIA and what led you to that?

Imani Black [00:01:47] Yeah, absolutely. I think a lot of really great marine science organizations started in the summer of 2020. So I'm just super happy just to be a part of that like mini coalition. But yeah, I had been an oyster farmer for six years leading up to that point, and I was still working at an oyster farm in Maryland as the Assistant Hatchery Manager until May of 2020 and then I unexpectedly lost my job and I just had been going through just this, you know, kind of feelings of where I was in my career, my dissatisfaction with the sometimes, you know, being treated, you know, certain ways and my career as a woman and as a person of color. And I just got really curious about like, okay, when was the last time I saw a person of color, like in my workspace? So like at an aquaculture event or at an oyster event. And I really couldn't think of anyone that I had met over that six years, like over my career. And originally I just thought it was just because I had been working in mostly Maryland and Virginia. And so I started asking people just, you know, about if they knew anybody just in the country that was doing when interested in aquaculture as a person of color, in a leadership role. And no one could really give me an answer. And so the week that I got let go for my job was the week before George Floyd. And so as a person of color, just feeling all the feelings about those tragedies in 2020 and the heightened conversation of diversity and inclusion, I just got so moved by that, but also moved by the lack of concern and just sort of, you know, I would say just attention that the

aquaculture industry was giving diversity and inclusion and all that stuff. And so, you know, that kind of was one of the catalysts for me starting MIA was no one could really give me an answer on like what other people of color were in leadership roles in aquaculture. And then some of the action items that the aquaculture industry was pledging that they were going to do, like bringing DEI conversations in the conferences and stuff. And I was like, Why do we keep talking about DEI and changing it? Like you'd actually do something? And so, yeah, that's when I started MIA, originally to find other women of color in just that were in aquaculture, but then it just has grown into so much more than that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:08] Oh, that's a great, great origin story. And I've heard that before, actually. And I just it's really, really powerful. And I love the fact that you really started to throw out these questions to people like, excuse me, like, where are women in leadership? Where are people of color in leadership and women of color in leadership? Because, you know, we had Dr. Nikki Traylor-Knowles on here, who is at the Rosenstiel School in Miami, and she also started her organization, nonprofit, in that summer of 2020. And also, you know, put out a call to Twitter like where are the Black women in marine sciences? And then she started to get a lot of, you know, replies. And so you mentioned a shout out to the other marine organizations that have started specifically in that summer. And it's like Black Women in Marine Sciences and Black Women in Shark Sciences. It's a lot of really great organizations, and I always like to give them a shout out for sure when I can. So I think MIA is an actual nonprofit, right? You have nonprofit status.

Imani Black [00:05:07] Yes. We've been an official 501c3 since July of 2020. So yeah, I got really moved by just the entirety of it all. And like I said, I was really in this space of feeling kind of like lost in my own career and like feeling, you know, frustrated and dissatisfied with, again, some of the things that I had experienced in my own career. And I was like, You know what? Like, this is a lot like bigger than me. And so I just started Googling, like, how do you start a nonprofit? And yeah, I've just been Googling things like that ever since. Of like, how do you do this and how do you do that? So it's really been a learning curve that I've just been trying to teach myself about the nonprofit, you know, kind of business, the logistics of it all. According to the IRS, we're in official 501c3. So, hey, I pat myself on the back because I without even knowing how to start it, I started a nonprofit.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:57] So you did it. You actually did it. That's amazing. And I have to say that SAGE is not a nonprofit actually, technically, it's a project of another nonprofit because that's a mechanism that you can use. And I decided to go that route. And so I give you a huge kudos for going and doing that all on your own. And yes, Google is our friend, University of Google. I recently did an interview like it was in a publication and they asked me like, what are some of the things that I wish I knew before I started my nonprofit initiative or just venture? And so it was a little bit difficult to come up with some things because I felt like I did a lot of research, you know, before I went on this venture. And I, like you, also lost my job in April of 2020. So I also had this soul searching moment and decided that I wanted to continue to provide value to this industry, to the seafood industry, but in a different way. And, you know, I was also influenced heavily by the events of the summer of 2020, specifically after the murder of George Floyd. And so I hear you about kind of the soul searching that you have to kind of engage in during that time. It was very difficult. So can you share a couple of things that you wish you knew before you started MIA?

Imani Black [00:07:13] Yeah, I wish I knew anything about nonprofit business. I think when I was talking to an executive director in Baltimore, she was saying that 95% of nonprofits start, you know, are developed because of passion of the person that wants to

start it. And then 85% of those same nonprofits go under within five years because passion is not sustainable always like you have to shift into a business mindset of a nonprofit even though it's not a for profit business, it still has to have that structure as if it was a for profit business, as you know, strategically and logistically. So I think I just wish that I had known all of the aspects of starting a nonprofit from the beginning of, you know, just like board and paperwork and taxes and, you know, just the structure of it. Because, like I said, I was just really just trying to learn as much as I could. And of course, you don't know something until you know it. And so, of course, there were some mistakes in that that I had to, you know, go back and restructure and redevelop. But yeah, I would say it would just for me, it would just be like that business mindset of a nonprofit as I was in, you know, the oyster farmer, you know, mindset. So yeah, I feel like that would be something that would have been super helpful just to kind of understand and know in the beginning.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:08:35] Yeah, that's the similar sentiment that I had in that interview. I wrote taxes are no joke. it's true. Like even though you have nonprofit status, you still have to kind of contribute and pay certain amounts of money. And it's really, really challenging. And I don't even to this day know, to be honest with you, what's happening. So you're not alone?

Imani Black [00:08:55] Yeah, no, I definitely hired a tax advisor for that because I'm so grateful that we're in a space that I need to as it's a little bit out of my realm. Initially, it's out of my realm but I think, you know, in 2020 when we just started, we barely made any donations. That was really like me, just trying to get the word out there. So taxes, you know, back in 2020 were very, you know, simplified. And then now, you know, we're in a position where people have donated, people have made contributions, and we've just done a whole lot as far as like within our members and things like that. So taxes are a little bit more complicated this year, but, you know, it's okay. I hope that it continues to keep getting a little bit more complicated because then that just means that we're getting the resources that we need to do what we set out to do.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:41] That's right. It's kind of like a good problem to have. Right. And of course, that's when you hire the expert that can help you and help you maneuver and navigate those kind of things. That's a good call. You know, we were a little delayed starting our discussion today because you were having a discussion with your thesis advisor, I think. And so you're super busy. So you're also in is it grad school?

Imani Black [00:10:01] Yeah, I'm getting my master's.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:10:03] Awesome. So as the founder and president and CEO of a nonprofit, as well as someone who's getting their master's degree, you're super busy. What sort of tools and tips do you use to prioritize your life and workload?

Imani Black [00:10:17] Oh, I'm still trying to come up with those tools and tips. Yeah. You know, on top of going to grad school and, you know, developing my thesis right now and working on MIA and then, you know, I do a lot of like extra things, like I'm a head coach for a private school's lacrosse team. I've been doing lacrosse and coaching and things like that for about five years now. You know, all year round I coach for a travel team. So yeah, it's a lot. But I think that, you know, I try to fill my time and my schedule with things that I like to do. And I think that, you know, prioritizing my life and workload, that's been a real priority for me this year, specifically because I think last year I was trying to do it all like I would have classes three times a week and like, you know, Tuesday, Thursday out of class. I started at 11 and I would try to fit as many meetings as I could between 9 a.m. and

11 a.m. and then do my class for an hour and a half and then try to fit meetings after that. And I just really realized at the end of the semester that I just can't do that anymore. It's not sustainable. So having an online scheduler, that's been super helpful. Yeah. Shout out to Leslie Townsend from Black in Marine Science, because I definitely stole that from her the first time we chatted and I told her that I was going to steal that from her because going back and forth about meeting times and all this stuff is just like takes way too much time. So that's been really great for me. I also am ADD, so that's another kind of thing that is on my repertoire of that I have to like really kind of fine tune and get a routine down and things like that. So really keeping up with my schedule and my planner, making sure I'm writing everything down, making sure I'm trying to stay organized as I can on things so that I know due dates. I know when things need to be finished and my physical calendar is a colorful mess. Color coding was supposed to make it more efficient so I could look at it and be like, Yeah, blue. Okay, that means that. But now there's just so many things on one day that it just looks like a rainbow. Just like one week just looks like it looks crazy, but it's been okay. I think I've been learning what works for me as I have gone through all of this.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:35] That's right. It's just like starting a nonprofit. It's a learning journey. How to keep your tasks prioritized, also a learning journey. And I tell you what, it never ends. So good on you. I bet coaching like a lacrosse team is probably very similar. Like, I bet there's a lot of skills that transfer over to your daily life, right?

Imani Black [00:12:53] Yeah. I think that a lot of the things that I'm doing are kind of on a similar path and yeah, coaching, you know, being organized. But also I've been doing coaching for so long that right now it's second nature. You know, I played lacrosse at Old Dominion when I've been playing competitive lacrosse since I was in third grade. So, you know, I've kind of know that realm a lot. And so that's a hobby of mine or a job of mine that I keep on my schedule, even though sometimes it's really hard to fit it in and it kind of gets in the way because I know that if I was to take that out of my schedule, that I wouldn't be doing all the things that make me Imani Black. And so I would rather struggle to fit those things in because they are truly me and they are truly things that make me happy. So yeah, I think that just with everything filling your schedule with things that truly make you happy and so they don't feel like work has been something that's been, I would say, a tip of mine that I've been trying to restructure my schedule to.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:13:52] That's a really great tip. And I think with anything, you should really try to do only the things that you love.

Imani Black [00:13:57] Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:13:59] So I've been doing this podcast for a little while now and your episode will show up in season two. So we're just celebrating the end of season one, right now. And so I do a lot of research before I talk to someone and you are very busy, like I said, and you have a pretty big web presence. So it was great because I was able to kind of dig into you. You know, we've done other podcasts and listen to those and it's been really helpful because to prepare for this discussion and conversation and in a recent interview and I want to say it was on the Aquademia podcast, but I could be wrong. But you said that aquaculture is the future. And so I just wanted to hear from you like, what do you mean by that? And if you could give us a little bit more detail in your mind why is aquaculture the future?

Imani Black [00:14:45] Yeah. Well, first off, shout out to the Aquademia podcast team because I even told them I think that that was one of the best interviews that I've had so

far. I've done a lot and I've been grateful for all of those opportunities. And second, I want to say I appreciate you really doing a deep dive into other interviews I've done and other podcasts and things like that before this because I think the commonality between Aquademia and you is that they did do that background information. So a lot of the questions like weren't cookie cutter. They felt like a conversation, which I really, really appreciate. But yeah, when I said aquaculture is the future, I meant that because I think that I truly, being from the commercial side and now being in the academia side in this new chapter of my career, I'm really understanding how connected and intertwined aquaculture truly is to everybody, not just the people that are farming it, not just the people that are studying it, but people that don't even know about it. And when you look at how much we already get imported for our seafood resource in the United States, that comes from aquaculture already you can see that it's already an industry that is just huge and just our resources in general. And so, yeah, I really think, you know, just as the wild fisheries just kind of decline and decrease and kind of go through their fluctuations, aquaculture will hopefully be something that is, you know, very concrete and sustainable as we move towards the future. But in that, everybody needs to know how important aquaculture is and what's going on in aquaculture for it to be the future. So we're on the trajectory, obviously, for aquaculture to be the focal point for our sustainable seafood resource. But I think in that the impact of that industry is going to come from the amount of people that really care about that industry.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:36] Yeah. And that's what you're trying to promote, right? With MIA. You're trying to get more people in the aquaculture field, correct?

Imani Black [00:16:43] Yeah. So more women of color and ones that are already in it and the ones that are interested in it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:49] And so you support them through internships. So you have members.

Imani Black [00:16:54] Mm hmm.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:54] And so they have access to opportunities that you generate.

Imani Black [00:16:58] Yes. So we have about over 60 members right now.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:01] Wow.

[00:17:03] Yeah, we started 2021 with only one. So we have grown so, so much. And all of the women currently in our community mostly are in all different ranges. Undergrad, graduate school, getting postdoc, already in the industry, things like that. So yeah, the way that we support them is basically the ways that they express to me that they need support. Every single member is an individual case. I don't believe in a one size fits all type of blanket, especially in MIA. Even though we're all women of color, we all come from different backgrounds, we all have different needs, we all have different desires. And so the kind of support that we give them is just in a range from the community support, the empowerment, the education of, you know, just what's going on in aquaculture. But yeah, then the fully funded internship program that we have where they can go to aquaculture farms or aquaculture processing plants or go to university and help them on their projects and be fully funded and kind of have those financial barriers and the barriers that women in general getting into marine sciences have to face. We're trying to really remove a lot of those things so that they can create their aquaculture career on their own terms.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:18:15] Yeah, that's amazing. Kudos that you have so many members already and you're only going to continue to grow that because, you know, I think about that a lot here at SAGE. It's like I also want to promote the seafood industry kind of more at the sale and purchase and buying level of seafood, right, the trade level. Get more women into industry. And you know, I think about this a lot. It's like I want to promote the industry so that people, you know, and specifically women join it and understand that's a viable career choice. But also, like you said, there's barriers and there's a lot of problems and challenges. And so it's kind of a parallel track where you have to address the barriers and the challenges and then have this pipeline of capable and enthusiastic and exciting people that want to join this industry. So how do you set them up for success? It's a challenge. Right?

Imani Black [00:19:02] Right. Well, I think what I've been kind of trying to add to our mindset of MIA is the labor shortage that we're facing in aquaculture. You know, I talked about this in Aquademia podcast that like I was reading something that was saying by 2025, you know, 1300 jobs within aquaculture will go unfilled, which will cost us millions of dollars. And so I didn't really realize at the start of MIA that I could be in a position to impact that and to have opportunities where our members are building up their career and building up their resumes and building up their experiences to be able to go into those unfilled positions and just hit the ground running and have the skills that the aquaculture industry is looking for. It has, you know, the knowledge that the aquaculture industry is looking for so that if someone was to look at their resume and they say that they're minorities and I remember remember that employer doesn't have to look any further. They're like, okay, yep, I know that she's coming from a great organization that does this, this and this. I also know she's knowledgeable about this, this and this, and so she is a viable candidate for this position.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:12] That's awesome. Like, that's so cool. You're just creating this amazing cohort of women that are really qualified to fill these empty positions when it starts being a real acute need. That's amazing. So I asked this question of another guest that we had on which Emily De Souza from Seaside with Emily. And I was again researching her and then listening to some of your discussions online. And you guys are both the same age, you know, and you guys are also half my age. I am twice your age, which is fine. I've talked about this before. I'm not ashamed to say it because I like being an elder statesman, I guess. But you know, and again, we both lost our jobs, you know, at the same time. And when I lost my job, I heard a statistic that said, you know, it takes people over the age of 50, on average, ten months to find a job, and that's during a healthy economy and not during a global pandemic. So I asked this question of Emily, and I would like to ask it of you as well. So what have some of the challenges been as a young woman in seafood for you or not? Like, has your age been a factor in your success or is it a challenge and in what ways?

Imani Black [00:21:24] Yeah, I think just being a woman in seafood, you face challenges whether, you know, no matter how old you are. But yeah, I definitely think that in the beginning of my aquaculture career, working out on oyster farms and in the hatchery and things like that, I definitely did face a lot of, you know, misogyny and racism, you know, in those spaces. One, you know, because of my age coming right out of college, you know, onto a farm, but then, you know, sort of not being able to in my college years to be able to really build out my resume because I was a Division one student athlete and that was my full time job on top of school. So yeah, as I've kind of moved through it, I feel like my age is both a factor in my success, but also a challenge because I think that with my age, a lot of

people are like, Wow, you're like really young. Like, what do you know about aquaculture? And you know, I think that in my success, it's like, oh, wow, you're really young. Like, okay, like you've got some room to really grow and be robust in your career and what you want to do. You're just at the beginning. I feel like in that factor of success, that's the part I'm really excited about, is that I did start so young, not just, you know, Minorities in Aquaculture, but just this new chapter of my career because the sky's the limit right now. You know, I had a kind of plan of what I wanted to do in my aquaculture career. And the universe is like, nahhh, we got something a little bit different in mind for you. So yeah, I would say that my age sometimes it's a thing. And sometimes I feel like it's an advantage that, you know, we have a little bit of like we have room to really grow something for the longevity of aquaculture, not just for 5 to 10 years or something like that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:08] Yeah, I think that's a great answer because I think you're right. I mean, with anything, right, there's disadvantages and there's advantages. And I think it's how you look at those and how you greet them head on. That's what's going to make the difference. And it sounds like you're taking full advantage of that and moving forward. But I would like to plug that even though I'm twice your age. I started fresh new, so it's never too late to start fresh and start new regardless of your age, right? So again, I mentioned that, you know, I was doing some research on you and I love the Oyster Ninja - Gardner Douglas. And so I listened to that podcast and he's so great and I thought your conversation was amazing. And you brought in kind of a point about how you had a conversation with yourself. And you mentioned this, I think, at the beginning of this podcast. So you kind of asked yourself, are your spaces promoting diversity and inclusion? And I love that question and I think we all need to ask that of ourselves and not just once, like constantly, we should be constantly asking ourselves that question. So I'm curious, what did your conversation with yourself sound like and what are some of the ways that we can all work to not only constantly ask yourself this question, but also promote and put some action behind these words, which I think you also mentioned. You know, it's time for action, right? So what was that conversation with yourself like and what can we continue to do to promote diversity and inclusion in our spaces?

Imani Black [00:24:23] Mm hmm. Yeah, I think. Yeah, that was such a big conversation with Gardner. Yeah, that was like, one of the first times. Like, I was on the podcast with Gardner. Yeah, I think I called him randomly in 2020 and told him about MIA, like MIA wasn't even a thing yet and I was like, hey, like, I got this like idea. I don't really know. Like, it's like, it's got to be anything and you know, so it was nice to talk to him formally about that. But yeah, the conversation, the diversity inclusion piece was definitely a part of that conversation. It was kind of the center point. But another piece of that was like, I was in that space. Like I was saying was like, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I was really frustrated with where I was like in my career and all the things that had happened to me in my career and that were happening in that moment. So I was dealing with a lot of like imposter syndrome. I still, you know, we all go through that. But I think in that moment I had to really be like, okay, I had to write down on a whiteboard every single thing that anyone had ever said to me that like I still was like harboring on to like, you're lazy, you're not smart enough, like oysters, like that's not a career. And like, you know, you should do a different career because, like, you're not good at math and science, like all these things. And I went through that whole list and I was just like, Huh, well, that's not true. Like, I graduated from college and like, so and yeah, like, that's not true because, like, I did X, Y and Z and now I've got a full fledged career in aquaculture. And like, so with the diversity/inclusion piece added into it, I just was like, are like the places that I really was investing my time into like I had invested two and a half years into this one company that I was with at the end, you know, for those two and a half years leading up to 2020 and I had

worked my butt off like I had really dove into like this is what I want to do. And when I really thought about the time and the energy and the effort and just like the frustration that I had towards that time in my life, I was like, were they really promoting diversity and inclusion. Like when I look back on my career, I was like, No, I didn't really feel safe there in that company or in the location that we were at. And I talked about this on the Aquademia podcast too, of like, no, I felt like very racially profiled. And when I was at that company and then where we were too, I didn't feel safe at all as a person of color. Especially as a Black woman. And then, you know, me being let go a week before George Floyd that just like confirmed to me that I should not have been there, that that would have been a really bad place to be. But I think, you know, some ways that we can all promote diversity and inclusion is, like you said, asking ourselves that question, but really looking at our spaces like in a more like not just like statistical way, but just like do we really think that this is impacting the people that we're trying to impact? Like, not from, like our ego level of like I'm trying to check this diversity/ inclusion box because, let me tell you, in the beginning of MIA, everybody was trying to jump on the bandwagon, which I understand it's very hot and ready to go bandwagon. It's a very hot and heavy train. I totally get it. But I had to really realize like, oh my God, like, you're really just trying to check a minority box, like, okay. So yeah, I would say like, you have to really ask yourself if you're doing it genuinely and then like who for and what for? Because if you can't ask yourself this question to be honest about those answers to yourself, I think that was like really the key point of this conversation was myself that I would be really honest. I'd really dig deep and like down into like why I was doing the things that I was doing and why I was feeling the way that I was feeling. So yeah, I would say you just have to have an open and honest conversation with yourself about like who you're trying to reach, how you can do that impactfully, and then how you can do that in the long term. Because not just for right now, just check a box to like how you can do that for five, ten, 15 years from now.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:11] Yeah. I mean, I think that's so insightful and I think it's not only the responsibility of the individual to do that, but it's the responsibility of like a company wide. Like, ask yourself again, it's like, are you checking a box or are you actually wanting to create safe and inclusive and diverse spaces? And why? Right. And not only, again, individually company level, but also at the sector level. And I think that's where, you know, MIA is a real powerful force that can actually be the reminder that we all need to do this and we all need to be held accountable. And I hope SAGE can be that as well, because I honestly try to do that as well. So I don't have a board, you know, to keep me accountable yet, but I will at some point. So I do try to keep myself accountable. And I think, you know, in terms of, again, going back to MIA, you're providing, you know, mentorship and internship opportunities to your members. And SAGE, you know, we have similar goals here to do that in the future. But aside from that, how can I support women in seafood and how can SAGE support women in seafood in a way that might be different from providing membership opportunities, in your opinion? You know, it's all evolving right now. So I'm just curious what you're thinking about. What do you need?

Imani Black [00:29:26] Yeah, I mean, I think that, you know, SAGE has done so much already. I'm a full supporter. And I think at the very beginning of SAGE, I was like, Oh, like, what is this? What is this like? And then I like that's how like I originally got connected with SAGE. But yeah, I just think like inspiring women in the work sector of seafood and just like seafood in general of like having conversations like this with like incredible people, you know, that are doing incredible things. Again, you don't know what you don't know, you know. And so having these conversations, making that point really clear that it's like not a one size fits all. There's not one path of getting in to seafood. There's many different viable career options that you can do. So yeah, I would just say, just keep doing what you're

doing that is supporting MIA in itself. And you know, I'm always down to add SAGE to the partnership list officially, so we could talk about that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:30:17] Oh, I would love that. And see, I didn't. Yes, I would love that. And I would also love to be able to provide opportunities for any of your members to come on the show. I mean, as you know, and you mentioned fundraising. I mean, fundraising is a huge part of this job, right? And your job and my job. And so the more that we can support each other and find opportunities to collaborate, the more, kind of, you know, it's attractive. And I would love to be able to continue to provide these opportunities. So yeah, let's continue to have that discussion and I would love to have some of your members on in the future as long as, you know, God willing, this podcast keeps going. And that's a great answer. Thank you. Because sometimes, you know, I think about providing a platform for people to talk is so important, but it seems so simple, right?

Imani Black [00:31:01] Yeah. It's all in the simple things that we don't really think of or that we overlook that could really be impactful. So yeah, I think that even in such a great job, like I said, I've been following you since the beginning of SAGE, so I think that, you know, providing this platform, providing the information and the knowledge is just adding to that impactfulness in itself. So congratulations and great job on all the things that you've done.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:24] Thank you. Thank you. The feeling is definitely mutual. I'm skipping through a little bit of the questions that I have here just because of time. And I want to be mindful of that. So I'm going to ask you, you know, SAGE is about uplifting and amplifying diverse voices, as we talked about, in the seafood industry and this podcast is one of the main ways we're doing this. So I'd love to give you the opportunity to uplift someone or, you know, several people. So who would you like to uplift and why?

Imani Black [00:31:51] I think I'm going to give a shout out just to our MIA members. I love uplifting them. I love highlighting them because when I get connected with them and just meet them for the first time and just hear like all the things that they want to do, they've done or things like that. I'm just like, Oh, my God. Okay, all right. Like, I thought I had done something, but, like, clearly not. But I just get so excited by just all of their things. Yeah, I would say yeah. Just shout out to all the MIA members currently that are just in a part of the community that just make it what it is now and that I've just been able to connect with because they're all amazing women of color and just doing really amazing things. And I'm just looking forward to us building MIA to benefit all of us.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:39] I love that shout out. And I also shout out all the members of MIA and welcome and I'm so happy that everybody's like really finding aquaculture to be a viable career choice. And I'm wondering, is it all types of aquaculture or is there one specifically like oysters that you find most people are interested in? This is just a random question that just occurred to me.

Imani Black [00:33:01] I think it's kind of a range. So even though the logo, it does have an oyster on it. Little inside that was supposed to be temporary. I made that MIA logo with my friend in like 20 minutes or less, I still have like the scribbles, like the sketches of like what I wanted that to be from back in 2020. And I just took it her and I was like, I'll know how to put this together on computer, like, can you help me and she did. So even though it hasn't always drawn it, we are, you know, try to cover all the different aspects of aquaculture because a lot of our members are in all different aspects of aquaculture, from finfish to oysters to kelp, you know, they're just doing it all. So we try to keep MIA as open as we can to all of those different aspects.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:33:44] So are you international? Because I think you might have mentioned this in another podcast and I can't remember the answer to that. Are you working internationally as well or are your members all around kind of the U.S. or North America?

Imani Black [00:33:55] We do have a few international members, yeah. So. Sri Lanka, Norway, Italy currently is like where we are right now. There's only a few, but yeah, we're mostly doing a lot of the work with our U.S. members because they're on the East Coast and West Coast. But until we get the resources to be able to fully engage with our international members, that's like on our horizon, that's in our trajectory right now. So yeah, we're international looking for international partners for anybody that's listening to this too, if you want to help us expand that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:26] Yeah, I have, according to the podcast platform, there's a few internationally located listeners, so maybe they can offer some words of support as well. That's awesome. So how can our listeners find you online and support you? Like, first of all, how can we support you and how can we find you online?

Imani Black [00:34:43] Yeah, well, support MIA, well definitely go visit our website. Just type in Minorities in Aquaculture and the website should pop up. Look at, you know, some of the things that we're trying to do, donate if you can, you know, spread the word about MIA if you can. Share this podcast and some of the other podcasts' talking about MIA. To find me, my personal page is Imani Black on Instagram. On Twitter, it's Imani Black MIA. I'm sure if you just Google Imani Black, my picture should come up in that search somewhere. And then MIA on social media is just MIAngo, so Minorities in Aquaculture nonprofit organization and again it should come right up. So like, share, follow if you can't, you know, donate, no amount of support is too small.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:35:35] That's awesome. And well, I have to tell you, I mean, we're at the end of our conversation and you're such an inspiration to me. Honestly, I just can't tell you enough how exciting your whole effort is. And I support you 100%, and we'll definitely have to collaborate in the future. And I look forward to watching you grow and just drive this impact that, you know, we've been dying to see for thousands of years, pretty much in aquaculture. So I'm really, really excited for you and I'm really happy to have you on the show and I hope to have you again and, you know, in the future. And we can talk about all the progress you've made.

Imani Black [00:36:10] Yeah, absolutely. I'm super excited and thank you so much. Like I said, we've had incredible people on this podcast, so I was like, Oh my God. Julie, okay, but.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:20] You are welcome. You are welcome any time, anytime. So thanks again and we'll talk to you soon, Imani.

Imani Black [00:36:28] Alright, thank you. Bye.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:30] Thank you for tuning in to the Conch Podcast. It would be amazing if you could take just 2 seconds to leave a review and share this podcast with your ocean loving friends. Thank you! The Conch Podcast is a program of Seafood and Gender Equality, or SAGE. Audio production, engineering, editing, mixing and sound design by Crystal Sanders-Alvarado for Seaworthy. The theme song "Dilation" is written

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