

Discuss how your unique experiences have shaped your perspective on your education and profession. Based on these experiences, how do you plan to ensure impact, innovation and inclusivity in the classroom and in your profession?

And as I turned the corner, I came face to face with this man. By most standards, he was an ordinary man—average build, slightly balding, probably in his late forties. What was odd was that he was covered head to toe in black face paint with exaggerated bright red lips. Bewildered, I watched as he went about his day, including more than a few easy greetings with some locals. My mind raced: What was this? Was he protesting? Was he a flat-out racist? Why did the locals beam with amusement when they saw him? In summary: What the f**k?

After some internet sleuthing, I had my answer: this man was dressed as Zwarte Piet, a Dutch Christmas tradition where locals dress as Santa's 'helpers,' a practice with deep colonial connotations. That afternoon, I broached the subject with my classmates during a tutorial at the University of Maastricht where I was on a yearlong exchange. "It's horrible, no? Such abject racism." One classmate turned to me with a blank expression: "It's tradition, it doesn't matter that much." In that moment—and many since—I've wrestled with the challenge of navigating cross cultural and intersectional differences in ways that are both inclusive and respectful. Disagreement is inevitable, particularly when 'tradition' is mentioned, but how we engage with it shapes who we become. For me, this means approaching everything with empathy and an open mind, even when I strongly disagree. As a cis-gendered, white, privately educated male from Australia, my perspective is shaped by privilege—I have lived a life free from discrimination. Acknowledging this drives me to challenge my own assumptions and seek out diverse perspectives. This mindset has led to profound conversations and meaningful connections, both academically and professionally, enabling me to foster innovation, inclusivity, and real impact in the spaces I engage with.

Throughout my life, I've been both at the centre and periphery of contrasting environments. These experiences have significantly shaped my understanding of privilege, group dynamics, and communication, influencing how I navigate academia and professional life. Three moments stand out. At 15, I received a scholarship to an elite Australian boarding school, leaving behind modest schoolyards and housing projects in a declining industrial city for the sprawling estates and state-of-the-art facilities of Sydney. While the physical contrast was striking, a more subtle, mental change became the most glaring. At my new school, ambition was contagious, but back home, futures often felt pre-determined. This early exposure to such disparities grounded me in a deep empathy I hope I carry to this day and reinforced that motivation is shaped as much by environment as it is by personal drive.

Years later, while on exchange in the Netherlands, cultural contrasts were ever present. But what struck me most was not the differences, but a shared colonial legacy. The Zwarte Piet debate mirrored the Australia Day/Invasion Day discourse back home—both traditions masking histories of oppression. This reinforced for me that the impacts of colonialism, while they may take different forms, are universal.

The most defining experience, however, came in my final year of university. As an arts major, I was often the only cis white male in a room filled with peers from diverse backgrounds. For one hour a week, I was the minority and they the majority, and each class became an immersive experience in perspectives unlike my own. The precision with which my peers articulated their thoughts pushed me to refine my own language.

Then came the moment that reshaped my self-awareness—a transgender mature-age student called me out in class for dominating a breakout room discussion, using exclusionary language, and failing to create space for others. I vividly remember recounting it to my mother, who remarked how it's hard to think of yourself as something, only to have someone hold up a mirror and show you otherwise. That moment forced me to continually reassess my privilege and be more intentional with my words – spoken, in print and when writing and recording music. Together, these experiences have left a lasting imprint on how I engage in academic and professional spaces. I've become far more conscious of stepping back, listening, and ensuring that diverse voices shape discussions rather than assuming leadership by default. I now recognize how language can either empower or alienate, and I actively seek out challenging conversations—not as debates to win, but as opportunities to understand perspectives shaped by different lived realities.

My experiences navigating diverse environments have shaped my commitment to fostering impact, innovation, and inclusivity in both academic and professional spaces. I genuinely believe meaningful change comes from being open to tough conversations, reassessing assumptions, and actively creating space for all voices. With this in mind, I would approach my work in music technology and data analytics through a lens of ethical responsibility, creative problem-solving, and inclusivity. I want to drive ethically informed, data-driven change in the music industry—particularly by helping decentralize existing models of compensation, distribution, and marketing. Right now, major labels and streaming platforms dictate who gets heard and who gets paid. By applying AI and data analytics in smarter, fairer ways, I would like to help

develop systems that give independent and underrepresented artists more visibility and equitable pay, building on the groundwork already laid by platforms like Bandcamp. I'm especially interested in using AI and music tech to build better recommendation models—ones that introduce people to a wider range of genres and artists instead of just reinforcing what's already popular. Music discovery should be expansive, not restrictive, and I want to push for tech that broadens cultural exposure rather than narrowing it. Personally, I find today's music recommendation algorithms frustratingly narrow, doing little to foster exploration or discovery. They often reinforce familiar tastes rather than encouraging new interests that cross genres.

More than anything, my experiences have made me hyper-aware of the need to provide spaces for underrepresented voices. Whether that's designing platforms that help emerging artists break through, improving compensation models, or advocating for better industry standards, I want to help shift the power dynamics in music. In both the classroom and my career, this means stepping back when necessary, amplifying different perspectives, and making sure the tools I help build contribute to a more diverse and representative industry. At its core, I see impact, innovation, and inclusivity as completely intertwined. By applying an ethical, forward-thinking approach to music technology, I hope to drive tangible change—ensuring the industry reflects a broader range of voices, not just the ones with the deepest pockets.