



PREVENT RESIST SUPPORT

Episode 9: Racism & Sexual Violence

with Tiyondah Fante-Coleman



University
of Windsor

Sexual Misconduct Response
and Prevention Office

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Anne Rudzinski: Hey everyone, I'm Anne and this is Prevent Resist Support, a podcast by the Sexual Misconduct Response and Prevention Office at University of Windsor.

Transition music: I've got your back my dear and I know that you've got mine. I feel that hope and fear but I know we'll hold the line. So keep your head up. Keep your hand out when your breath is feeling short. Prevent Resist Support.

Anne: So today I get to chat with Tiyondah Fante-Coleman, and we're going to talk about race and racism, sexuality and sexual violence. And I'm so excited to chat about this topic, and all of the intersections of race and gender and sexuality and the ways that we think about that in relation to sexual violence. Tiyondah has a BSc in health sciences and an MA in community psychology from Laurier and is going to be starting her PhD at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. Tiyondah researches exploring access to health care, mental health and the behavioral and cultural influences of sexuality, especially among racialized and minority populations. Her master's thesis was about health care access for ACB folks in Kitchener, Waterloo, and ACB means African, Caribbean and Black. Tiyondah also works at Black Health Alliance in Toronto on the Pathways to Care Project, which she'll tell us a little bit about in our episode with her today. But before we get into her chat with Tiyondah, I always just want to make sure that we're sharing our support resources. So at the University of Windsor, you can

reach out to our office at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. Or you can check out our website [uwindsor.ca/sexual assault](http://uwindsor.ca/sexual-assault). Or if you're not in Windsor, and are in Ontario more broadly, and are looking for sexual violence support, you can check out the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centers, their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca. So let's jump into our chat with Tiyondah.

Welcome Tiyondah,

Tiyondah Fante-Coleman: Thank you so much for having me, Anne.

Anne: I'm so excited that you're here with us today. Can we start by just hearing a little bit about the work that you've been doing in your research and also in your work with pathways to care?

Tiyondah: Yeah, absolutely. So I currently work as a researcher for the pathways to care project, which is a project that aims to increase access to mental health care for black children, youth and their families across the province of Ontario. We are a funded project by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Ontario Trillium fund. And so we're a five year project that's trying to do a bunch of things, namely, research and implementation. So our research phase really focuses on qualitative research, speaking to communities and understanding specifically what they want to see from the mental health care system for black youth. And so in those conversations, we're talking to black youth, family community members, our mental health care workers, as well as surveys that we're doing with organizations across the province. And really, we want to take that information and put it into action. So we want to develop a strategic framework that people can use, we want to develop resources, you know, academic papers, but also community reports, stuff that we think would be really useful, and for people to use this information to make it easier for Black people to access care.

Anne: That's amazing. And that's kind of similar to what you did in your graduate work.

Tiyondah: Yeah, it is very similar in that it's a community based research project. And I really like community based research. For my thesis. For my master's, we focused on access to health care for African Caribbean

and black people living in Waterloo Region. Because that's, that's where I had done my work. And that project we did in partnership with a nonprofit, an AIDS nonprofit. And that was really great work to do. So I'm excited to be able to continue to work with my community and to do some more community based work.

Anne: Amazing. I always like to ask this question, because you know, a lot of our listeners are students. And when they hear about this work, sometimes they get really excited about it. And they want to know, like, how do I do that? So how did you get started in this line of work?

Tiyondah: It's never a straight line. I think when people find careers that they really love. Definitely it started for me, as an undergraduate student, I want it to be a physician, my parents definitely wanted me to be a physician, too. But when I got to school, it's not that I I, you know, didn't like my classes or anything like that, but it just didn't resonate with me, and the way that I thought about health and access to health. The ways that people talked about health was so much more biomedical than the ways that I had talked about growing up with my family. So I kind of was sitting with that tension a little bit and then I took a course called the Social Determinants of Health with a person you may know, Dr. Rob Travers. And that was a really big turning point for me, I learned so much more about what health actually was, what the systems were the impact of health, stuff like that. And that really kind of started me wanting to think about taking taking this work into grad school and thinking about research in a different way. I don't know if I've ever actually decided that I was going to do research work forever. I think I kind of had thought about grad school as more of a stepping stone into working with my community in any capacity. But I really fell in love with qualitative research as I did it more and got better at it. And so that's kind of how I ended up where I'm at. Definitely not linear. But you know, I'm really happy to be where I am.

Anne: I love that. I love qualitative research, there's something really magical about hearing folks' stories and their thoughts. And you know, looking at that, that data in a different way than just looking at numbers. So

Tiyondah: That's exactly it. And you get to really like, like you said, a story to weave a story and really hold people's experiences. And I think about it in, the more I do this work, the more I think that it's so sacred, and so I really treat it with care, just listening to people's stories, because they're trusting you to tell you about the things that they've experienced in their lives.

Anne: Yes, there's, um, I have a painting that says, perhaps stories or data with a soul, I think it's by Brene Brown.

Tiyondah: Oh I love that.

Anne: Yeah. Um, so I'm really excited to chat about this book that we both read and prep for our chat today, which is they said, this would be fun by Eternity Martis. The book is about attorney who is a black woman who goes to a university in Ontario, it's Western University. And she talks about her experiences with racism and sexual violence. And we're actually giving away three copies of this book as part of a promo for our podcast this week. So let's start with Tiyondah. What did you think of the book,

Tiyondah: Oh, I loved this book. I love this book. Because I saw myself so much in her, we went to university around the same time, I think she might have gone like a year or two earlier than me. We moved from, you know, a fairly multicultural city, I think she moved from Toronto, and I moved from, from Pickering. But we moved from like, very, like multicultural areas to areas that were a little less so. Um, and just, you know, that university experience that she was super excited to have. I was also super excited to have that university experience. I'd visited my cousin at Laurier before I decided to go there. And I had such a great time with her that I was like, Oh, yes, this is this is the next step. This is what I'm going to do. And seeing how it evolved for her, this idea of what it was going to be and then the reality literally, they said this would be fun. And finding out but it's it's still fun. But you know, there's a lot, there's a lot more to that fun. There's definitely like a dark underbelly of that fun. Kind of resonated with me as well. So I really enjoyed it.

Anne: Yeah, I think what was so eerie about reading it was the similarities between you know, I'm a white woman, but there was a lot of things that I saw in the book that I was like, Yeah, I remember that stuff happening. When I was in school. I remember hearing about that. And you know, I'm going to tell this story, you and I, when we were in grad school, we were in a meeting together, we were talking about a workshop for sexual violence prevention on campus. And there was this white male student and we were talking about racism on campus. And he said, I've never seen racism on this campus.

Tiyondah: Yeah, I definitely remember that conversation. And I definitely remember us looking at each other, like, how do we answer this? But I think we handled it well. I can't quite remember. But I definitely remember what he said. And I just said, Well, I don't I don't believe that you would see racism on campus. Like, why would you be the person who sees racism on campus, you're not the recipient of racism. So it's, it's very interesting. And I, I think, you know, I really loved my university experience, but you know, those echoes of racism, we're all there. When she pulls them out in the book, and she talks about them. They're all there. And the similarities are so striking. But I think, you know, I think looking back on it, now, it's a lot more clear, but at the time, you're like, Okay, this is racist, but what can I do about it? And she talks about that in the book a lot, like, okay, you know, there's not, there's nothing we can do about someone saying something racist to you, or someone making a weird comment at a party. It's just that I don't want to call it lukewarm racism, but it's just the racism that permeates the environment.

Anne: Yeah, and I think there's definitely a parallel not to say that the experiences are equal in any way. But I think there's a bit of a parallel with sexual violence where sometimes after you experience harassment or after you experience assault, when you're away from it, you're able to process it and think about it so differently.

Tiyondah: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, you know, you go through a similar thought process, that kind of fight or flight or freeze response. And you're like, I don't even know what to say, over time. Certainly you kind of refined the ability to point something out and name it and, and

shame the person who's doing it. But the first few times it happens to you. You're just so surprised and shocked that someone could actually say that to your face, and, and not be self-conscious about it. And so you're just like, oh, my goodness, what do I do, but then as soon as you step away, you first you feel shame for not being able to address it, right? You feel that that little bit of guilt, that you've let this person slide, and so they're going to do it to the next person, but you also feel recognition, and you understand that it's unlikely to happen to you again.

Anne: Yeah, I think this is so interesting, because I had a chat with somebody this week, who may be showing up on our podcast later, I don't want to spoil it in case it doesn't pan out. But one of the things we talked about was the ways that folks, when they experience harm, they feel the sense of obligation to prevent that harm from happening to somebody else. This person harmed me, I know that they've caused harm. It's my job to stop that harm. And I think that's really difficult.

Tiyondah: Yeah, absolutely. Certainly, certainly, that obligation is felt I could go into I can go into how that obligation shows up within academia, even beyond sexual assaults. But if I'm going to stay on topic, yes, absolutely. You do not want what happens to you to happen to another person, it becomes somewhat of a I don't want to say obsession, because I think that's, that's too strong of a word. But it definitely becomes what feels like a responsibility or a burden, to make sure that that doesn't happen to another person, because you don't want, you know, what it felt like to be caught unaware. You don't want that for somebody else.

Anne: I think what always stands out for me when I think about that is that this person has put you through this nonconsensual experience, and then your non-consensually put into this role of having to deal with accessing justice and having to deal with the prevention of it. And I think that's, that's just a lot for somebody to try to take on. And we know in the sexual violence world, like we don't have any programs, any educational programs that prevent people from perpetrating. Right. And so, um, yeah, I don't know, I think it's just really, it's a really difficult place to sit.

Tiyondah: Yeah, and I think that's, that's a particularly gendered lens as well, like, I think, for women, that burden to care for another person, beyond yourself is something that we all resonate with, especially when, you know, it's preventing somebody else from being harmed. And you're right, we don't have anything on campus that talks about, you know, preventing sexual violence, I would say that we have very little resources on campus that speaks about preventing racial violence as well. What we do have currently is clearly not enough. But yeah, and these are the things that really color your experience as a student, especially like young black women coming on to campus, these are the things that color your experiences to and nobody prepares you for those things. They're, they're worried about you keeping up your marks or having enough food. But nobody's telling you about, you know, the sexism, the racism that you're gonna face as a young 18 year old person.

Anne: Do you feel like you could speak a little bit about what some of those possible outcomes might be? Some of the ways that you're talking about, you know, young women of color experiencing the intersections of racism and sexism. So, you know, what are some of the ways that that impacts folks, I think Eternity talks about that quite a bit in her book.

Tiyondah: Yeah, absolutely. So in her book, she talks quite a bit about experiencing, you know, sexism and racism, off campus. A lot of things that happened to her happen off campus in that kind of middle area that's still very student centered, but not in the purview of the university. One of the things that resonated with me so much in the book was, she goes to, she goes out with her friends quite a bit. And one of the first things that she experiences is on Halloween, people are showing up at the club in blackface. And they're looking at her and they're taunting her with their presence. And they're kind of expecting her to react. And this is obviously something that is terrifying for her. And she talks a lot about how that experience makes her feel in the book. But what what are you supposed to do with that information? How do you how do you resolve that? It's not a campus thing, but it's obviously very student centered, who are the support network networks you can go to to address that. And she kind of just grapples with the fact that there's not much that she can do. And one of the reasons it resonated with me so much is because one, I think I've been

in the exact bar, but she's talking about in London. And for sure, I've definitely I've never experienced blackface at a party that I've been at, but certainly it happened when I was at school. And there, I didn't even think that there was an apparatus to go to, to to resolve some of those challenges. And so you kind of feel like you're left out. And you're trying to fend on your own. In terms of resolving these things, it becomes a very individual problem instead of something that's a community problem

Anne: That is so well said. And I think, you know, you and I are both folks who like to look at the community level. And I think that actually bridges really well into some of our next topics. But let's take a minute and just wrap up our conversation on this book first. Do you have any last thoughts on *They Said This Would Be Fun*?

Tiyondah: Yeah, I thought it was a really great book. And it really, really resonated with me. Nothing too high level. But I just really wanted to say that it felt good to hear about another girl who went to school, who was a Gemini, because I've just really wanted to say that we're both Geminis. It was nice to read. And that I completely resonated with her idea of people questioning why you decided to go away to school, because a lot of the people that I knew had, you know, decided to commute to some of the schools within the city of Toronto, and I decided to go to a much smaller school, and a predominantly white school. And so people were kind of questioning my decision. And in the end, I kind of questioned it too. But I did find my home. But the biggest challenge for me and doing that was that I couldn't find, you know, where the rest of my community were like, we're the Black people were in that city. And I did eventually find them. They always exist. But it took me a long time. And it would have saved me a lot of trips home to get my hair done.

Anne: Yeah, I think it's so helpful to hear the similarities between your experience and Eternity's experience. And I know that you ended up doing some really important work for African Caribbean and black folks in Kitchener Waterloo. So thank you so much for sharing that with us. And then I know you wanted to leave us with just one quote from the book. So let's turn to that now.

Tiyondah: So one of the most important quotes in the book, that Eternity brings up his five Zora Neale Hurston, and she says that if you were silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it. And so I think it's really important that we recognize the power of survivors' voices, and whether they choose to say that they're survivor or not. But that there's there's power in naming these power dynamics that are harmful to us.

Anne: I love that. So let's get into the other part of our conversation. Today, we're going to talk today about some of the sexual gender roles for black men and women and also some of the ways that black men and women are, you know, discussed or expected to act or to behave around sexual violence. And I think there's some really interesting intersections of gender, and race that come up through this conversation. So I'm super excited to get into some of our examples with you, and to talk through, you know, the ways that we can talk about this topic, think about this topic, and hopefully become a bit more nuanced in our discussion of it. Let's start with pop culture and sexuality, which is always such an exciting topic to me, how are black men portrayed in popular media examples as sexual beings?

Tiyondah: So this is a conversation that I think has has been going on for a long time. But I think black men are really positioned as people who are extremely hyper sexual. But at the same time, they're perpetrators of violence in such a way that everybody needs to be worried about the violence that they're going to perpetrate on them. It's almost like the behaviors of black men transcend into myths a little bit or lore, I would say. And so it becomes this trope, like, like the black man that jumped out of the bushes to harm somebody. And so I, I think it's a really harmful thing. I think it's a really harmful thing for black men to have to deal with. While also kind of keeping space for the fact that, you know, you know, sexual violence does happen and that there are men who do perpetrate sexual assault, right?

Anne: Yeah, I think one of the most interesting things about the sexual violence data is that we really see black men and men of color as perpetrators of sexual violence especially towards like a white woman.

But when we look at the data, the perpetrator of sexual violence is most often the same race as the victim or the survivor. So So we have this kind of like concept of what's happening that isn't really realistic to what's actually happening when we look at sexual violence. And I also want to highlight that when we're talking about black men sexuality, you know, on the negative side, we're portraying them as perpetrators of sexual violence, but on the like, quote, unquote, positive side where we're talking about the consensual sexual experiences, it's still really negative and is portrayed as either hyper sexual or like deviantly sexual, you know, it's kind of it's negative both ways.

Tiyondah: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And I agree with you, I would say, even even though the light, the positive light that you're alluding to, is, is quite this idea of the deviant black man. And I think if I want to tie this into, you know, history, I think this, this is a historical idea of black men in terms of in terms of their role in slavery. And their role is being you know, hyper sexual beings, whose you know, only one true desire is to, you know, have sexual relationships with white women. And so, when we talk about black men, and we talk about them as hyper sexual, and we say, you know, that they're always looking to have a sexual experience with somebody, what we're doing is we're priming them to be perpetrators of sexual violence, we're priming our minds to think of them as always guilty of being perpetrators of sexual violence, and that they're a danger not not only to women, but specifically to white women. And we're talking about them as though their sexuality is the most important thing about them. And so that's really harmful, right, that can be harmful for them in terms of convictions, in terms of who has support when when people are accused of sexual violence. Because if we're positioning people as being perpetrators of sexual assault, to such a degree, that it's almost pathological. And then we are believing that narrative that starts to move into the space where people are, you know, not given the tools they need to work with within the legal system, right? Because we're talking about rates of, I'm trying to save this properly, we're talking about rates of conviction. And if we're positioning these men as violent, and then they're also the same men who have a harder access to resources within the legal system, we're then convicting them at higher rates, which then feeds back into the cycle, that they're more violent than than other men.

Anne: Yes, they're not having the experience of like Brock Turner was witnessed perpetrating a sexual assault, and then, you know, was only given what, like nine months or a year or something in jail and only spent three months in jail. Like that's not the experience that black men are having in the legal system.

Tiyondah: Right. It's a very, very different experience. And I'm trying to hold space for the fact that, of course, black men perpetrate sexual violence, just like any identity can perpetrate sexual violence. But I think that this, this hyper narrative of black men as being these deviant sexual beings really does impact them. And if we're talking about, you know, post secondary, it impacts them there too, right? Because, what, like a lot of black men and post secondary, I was reading a study that basically said that they police everything they do, especially around white women, because the last thing that they want to do is to be accused of perpetrating sexual violence against a white woman, if that was not the case. And so they they take like protective measures for themselves, they don't go anywhere alone. You know, they try not to get out of the car in the parking lot if there's one person, although, you know, I highly recommend [the same a car], but for sure, you know, they changed. They're changing their behaviors in a way that that I don't think white men are thinking about. And it's all to protect themselves against this narrative that they are, you know, higher perpetrators of sexual violence.

Anne: Yeah, and I think one of the things that had me thinking about this a lot recently was I read this really wonderful book called Sexual Citizens. It's by Jennifer s. Hirsch and Seamus Kahn, and they talk about some of the history of sexual violence prevention on campuses. And one of the things that they said is that there is a history to portraying black men as the perpetrators of sexual violence on campus. And I think that came from, you know, in their description, the idea that when campuses first started talking about the risk of sexual violence, they were talking about the perpetrator being this like off campus person, they're not like a student on campus. And then that morphed into the person being this like off campus person who also was a black man. So not only is the black man a perpetrator, he's not a student, which I thought was really interesting.

Tiyondah: Which I think is really important because we've seen over the past year, how much black students are othered in spaces, the higher education, so not just men. But we've seen how there was a woman who was sleeping in her student lounge and she was accused of trespassing. There was a man, I believe that UWindsor who was accused of trespassing. And so when we're talking about the othering of students on campus, this all fits into the same narrative that the perpetrator is an outsider, but also black students are an outsider. And so you can see how this narrative also creeps to including black students who actually are on campus and belong on campus. I can think of a specific example, I think about the friends that I went to university with, who were football players. And so they went to university, they were football players. And they were also very hyper aware of the fact that that they could be seen as perpetrators, not only because they were black men, but they were black men who were football players who were, you know, physically bigger than the rest of us. And it's, it's something that they thought about for sure.

Anne: I think that's such a great transition for us to talk about Jameis Winston and the Hunting Ground documentary. So we both watched the Hunting Ground documentary when we were in our master's degree. And one of the things that we talked about was the idea that the only perpetrator who's named or shown in the documentary is Jameis Winston, who is a black man who's also a football player. And I really don't want to excuse the sexual violence that he perpetrated by any means. But I think there's a really specific impact of only showing a black perpetrator in a film about campus based sexual violence.

Tiyondah: Right. And I think that's that's an that's really important, because we're talking about if we're talking about the the stat that you had previously talked about how sexual violence is typically perpetrated by people who are of the same race or in the same social circle, the majority of the women in that documentary were white. And so statistically, we would assume that the majority of perpetrators would have been white. And I think that was alluded to quite a bit in the documentary, but then at the very end of the documentary to have the only perpetrator that was named to be a black man. And I think it's an

important distinction. This is a black football player. It's, it says a lot about how we view men, how we how we take care of stories of sexual violence, how what stories we perpetrate, what narratives we perpetrate. And I think it has, it ties back to, to that exploitation of black men. And I don't want to go too deep into the exploitation of sports and football. But we can talk about how that is a similar exploitation of them within, you know, the sports industrial complex of black men being used as carriers of entertainment, while simultaneously being seen as outsiders within the university space.

Anne: Yeah, and I think something else that I really want to touch on in relation to this Hunting Ground documentary, because I think the natural response to this example is well, the rest of those cases were like confidential, private cases. Jameis Winston was famous. And that case went to the media, and that's why they can show it. And yes, like, they can show it because it went to the media, and they couldn't show the other cases that were not shared in the media where the perpetrators name was not made public. Um, so yeah, I think that there is there are some other layers to why that might have happened. But I think focusing on the impact of that is really important. Even if there's like a reasoning behind why this one publicized case was the one that was shown in the documentary, I think it's important to think about, like, what is that impact of, of that being the only case that you show?

Tiyondah: Yeah, exactly. And I mean, we're talking about, you know, we're talking about Title Nine cases in the US, and the US is a very big place with a very large population, I'm sure had we, you know, put a little bit more effort into it, we could have found other cases that weren't blocked by, you know, privacy. And I think even even the notion of privacy and who is afforded privacy within these spaces, is also really needs to be looked through a racial lens, right, because certain people are afforded privacy because of the threat of litigation. And that threat of litigation is often tied to your real ability to be able to afford to do so.

Anne: Yes

Tiyondah: So, you know, that has a large impact on how we view these stories, too. And that ties back into the the conviction rates of black men as

well. Right. It's it's, we have to think about the the whole system and how how black men are portrayed and what resources they're not offered, while also not minimizing the very real you know, impacts of sexual violence on on people.

Anne: Yeah, so when it comes down to for me and this discussion is realistic risk, right? So and I think you've said this so beautifully, like we're not saying that black men don't perpetrate sexual violence, but the the hype around black men as perpetrators is not proportionate to the sexual violence that they're actually committing. And so I think what it comes down to is having a realistic thought about risk and, and, you know, talking about sexual violence in a way that is accurate to what's actually happening.

Tiyondah: Yeah, precisely. And I think even in this conversation, you know, we're really centering this, you know, racial discordance between a black male perpetrator and a white female victim. And at the same time, you know, there's lots of stories about black women who have been the recipients of sexual assault. And the the power dynamics are also shifted, depending on who the perpetrator of that assault was. But at the same time, those women have very few accesses to resources that can help them that can speak to their experiences from both a gendered and racial lens. So you know, there's a whole other layer of who's not discussed in these these larger narratives.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. And I think this comes to our next question really beautifully, which is, how are black women portrayed in relation to sexual violence? We know that black women experienced higher rates of sexual violence than white women do. You know, do you have any other thoughts about about the role that we're constructing around black women in relation to sexual violence?

Tiyondah: Well, I think just how black men are kind of hyper sexualized, I think black women are, are equally as hyper sexualized, if not more. And there's a real lack of agency in the ways that we talk about black woman's hyper sexualization. And I know, we're gonna get into that a little bit after but, you know, when we talk about black women, we're often talking about this trope of the Jezebel. And who, who she is and,

and that she's, she's always looking for, you know, a sexual experience. And that, you know, she's always open to that sexual experience. And I think that really impacts how we see women, especially black women, who who say, you know, something, something bad has happened to me on campus or off campus.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. And I know, we had a couple of examples we wanted to chat through on this topic, and one of them is the recent case with FKA Twigs. She's been in the media lots lately in relation to the domestic violence that she experienced at the hands of Shia Lebeouf. Do you want to share any thoughts about that example?

Tiyondah: Yeah, absolutely. I think this is a really important case, because, one it's a it's a racially discordant case in which she is a black woman, light skinned black woman, cuz I think that's an important distinction in terms of how we respond to different experiences. And her perpetrator was her her former partner Shia Lebeouf And, you know, honestly, the conversations around him, and, and his his own personal journey, factored way more into the discussion than I then I hoped it would. And I think it's somewhat of an apology, like an apologetic mindset that we have, when it's white male perpetrators, like we're always looking for a reason. Whereas the distinction between that and black male perpetrators is that it's inherent. Right? We're always, when we think about Brock Turner, for instance, we're Oh, he's a nice boy, this is gonna ruin his his college career. And it's like, Okay, and what about the person whose life was impacted by this? We're always looking to give the benefit of a doubt, for for, for white perpetrators. And I think that's even more so when the person that they've harmed as a woman of color, and a black woman. And even, and this happens, even in our own communities, because I think she had done a interview with Gayle, Oprah's best friend, and Gayle had asked her, why didn't you leave? And she had to push back and say, why would you ask me that question? I don't think that's an appropriate question. Why would you ask her? Why didn't she leave? You know, that's, that's a really horrible question one, because at this point, she's left and too, because it's dangerous. It's dangerous for women to do so. And it's it's dangerous. To ask that question of somebody who's clearly you know, having a very hard time.

Anne: That question drives me wild because it's like she did leave. She's here doing this interview, because she's left and Julie LaLonde, who we had on our Facebook Live last week. She has this piece on her Instagram where she says, you know, it's like asking somebody whose house is on fire, like, why didn't you leave, but like I'm outside of the house talking to you about about that experience. Like I did leave.

Tiyondah: I left. And and I mean, I think it should be noted that like Gayle is a black woman, and then she's asking another black woman, why didn't she leave? With all of the, you know, the dynamics that that fit into that? So? Yeah, like I think I think in our own communities we have to think about, we have to think about sexual violence, as well. And it's a very nuanced discussion that we need to have because again, we're talking about the experiences of sexual assault within a greater context of racism. But absolutely, you know, I think the ways that race play into how people are treated as victims is certainly certainly an important factor.

Anne: Yeah, definitely. So the other thing that I really want to chat with you about is WAP, which is honestly a little funny in Windsor because we have the the Chrysler auto plant that's called WAP, the Windsor auto plant and so funny interplay Windsor about the language of WAP, but for those of you that don't know, WAP is a song about women sexual desires by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion that came out, I believe in 2020 to 2020 2020.

Tiyondah: I think it's 2020

Anne: What is time? I don't know. Um, and I think there's some really interesting pieces about how black women sexuality is portrayed in the song and the way that people have talked about it.

Tiyondah: Yeah, first of all, can I just say that I love WAP like, it is a great workout song, I love WAP, I think it's an awesome song, it you know, has a good beat, fun to dance to. It's great. I love it. Love the video, it's kind of cool and funky. There's nothing wrong with WAP. I think people have a hard time with black woman's sexual agency. And I think that they want black women to be seen as hyper sexual beings, but only have

that sexuality done to them. And not to come from them. And so that is that is the big problem with WAP, I can think of a million songs that are just as, you know, interesting, and talk about sexuality as much as WAP. But the fact that it even became a national narrative, and had literal like political pundits talking about what is essentially a rap and pop song is mind blowing to me. I do not think that it, I think the analysis of the response is needs isn't really deserved. I think that the response was not deserved at all.

Anne: Yeah, it's wild. And I know when we talked about this before, you know, we both kind of said, We grew up with way hornier and way dirtier songs like Your Body is a Wonderland by John Mayer, that song is super dirty.

Tiyondah: It is it is and this is the same person who made those terrible comments about Jessica Simpson. And nobody's nobody's making think pieces about John Mayer. And you know, how how he's kind of over sexualizing people. And, and even then, we're even talking about somebody who's talking about another person's body, versus people talking about their own bodies and their own agency and what they want to do, and really owning their sexuality, like why can't black women own their sexuality? Why is it okay for everybody else, to talk about our sexuality and to consume our sexuality and to place sexuality on us. But the minute people start talking about it themselves, and talking about enjoying it and liking it, it's the problem.

Anne: Yes, I love that. I think that just fits in so well, with like, so much of our programming around the idea that like women's sexual desires matter, we should talk about women's sexual desires. And it shouldn't always be that we are like these people that are being acted upon, right, like women have their own sexual desires. So I love that right?

Tiyondah: Yeah, absolutely. Women have their own sexual desires. I had just kind of skimmed an article this morning, talked about the orgasm gap, which I think is very interesting. And I yeah, like women have sexual desires, they have the they have the ability to want sex and to enjoy it. And they're allowed to have agency and that and I think, I think that's really just what was because I haven't heard one woman I know,

complain about WAP. And so this is I think this is, you know, a mainly male challenge to enjoy the song. Enjoy the song. It's a fun song.

Anne: Actually, do you mind if we talk about a meme that I saw on Facebook that actually was shared by a woman? And it was also about Dr. Seuss? Can we talk about Dr. Seuss and WAP?

Tiyondah: Yes, we can talk about Dr. Seuss and WAP. And I'm really really interested how you're going to tie it together.

Anne: No, so I didn't tie it together. But there was this um, this meme that went around that kind of said, Why is this not okay with like this image of Dr. Seuss's you know, books that have been pulled by his own esteem for having racist imagery. And then the meme said and this is this is totally okay and acceptable and had like the image of Cardi B from WAP. And so the juxtaposition in this meme was like, why can't we look at these like racist stereotypes of people in Dr. Seuss, but we can hear Cardi B talk about her own sexual desires, which is just I don't understand. One of these things was created about somebody non-consensually and the other thing is a woman talking about her own consensual sexual desires. Anyways, I just go off about that for a while. But

Tiyondah: Just the just the cultural like monopoly that WAP has because WAP is not like a few months ago, we are in the streaming era now where songs come and go quickly. The fact that we have memes this week that talk about Dr. Seuss. I know the Dr. Seuss conversation is fairly recent. The fact that we are comparing these two just shows how much has transcended. I think it's originally purpose, but ya honestly I think, first of all I think it is ridiculous, like Dr. Seuss's books were extremely racist. You know, they were basically caricatures of black people and their own estate pulled them so again no one is being canceled. And second you can't cancel someone's own agency and own ability to talk about their sexuality, it is not the same thing. One is being done to somebody and one is being done by somebody for themselves. So ya I don't know if I have much to say about it, I have a hard time engaging it because I think it is ridiculous

Anne: Ya no, that's legit. Do you have any super horny songs that were popular when we were kids that we could maybe highlight beyond John Mayer, as just like other very sexual songs that have been popular that have received the same amount of outrage as WAP.

Tiyondah: I think I have a little bit of an unfair advantage in this conversation because I am the child of Jamaican and a lot of our songs are quite sexual. But you know, also when we talk about the sexuality songs, a lot of the songs, even WAP is even tame because a lot of the songs talk about female agency, we can delve, there's quite a lot in the whole genre, but a lot of the songs that I listened to growing up in terms of women's sexuality and just the music I grew up listening to was about women's agency and sexuality. That is not a thing that I think my culture has an issue with. So I think I have a little bit of a head start in terms of that conversation, but I am trying to think of some mainstream songs that I am trying to think of. Oh, definitely, I don't know what the title is called, but it is booty booty booty rockin' everywhere. That one. Certainly the one with Nelly, I think it is shake your tailfeather, where he takes a credit card and swipes it down a woman's derriere. There's so much more, so much more. Summer of '69.

Anne: Candyshop was popular when I was in like grade 8? Now I am telling everyone how old I am. That was popular. And also the It's Getting Hot In Here, take off all your clothes. That was...

Tiyondah: Oh, yeah

Anne: ...just normal.

Tiyondah: Definitely bangers. And I definitely still listen to those on my Spotify. And absolutely. And again, I don't want to just highlight just songs about black artists. I think that this is somewhat of a trope. But certainly there were a lot of songs that spoke to sex and sexuality in a way that is very overt and one would say just as overt as WAP was. As I mentioned, Summer of '69. Not even subtle, not even subtle. And I don't think that many people were writing op-eds about that. I think that is important when we talk about music too, like the whole parental advisory stickers that came about with music and black music. I believe

that it was Nancy Reagan in the US that did that in the 80s. And it is a very specific response I think to black people and music and certainly their ideas of us as being a violent population. But also sexuality and owning our own sexuality.

Anne: Can I just give a very personal and embarrassing example, because I am really into things ahta are embarrassing this year. I think that is super fun.

Tiyondah: I am starting to learn to share embarrassment because once you share it you release it So go ahead.

Anne: I love it. So, Shania Twain, great example, white artist, country music star. As I child I would listen to songs like Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under? And had no idea that was about sex. I just thought it was like you stored your boots under somebody's bed and that was a thing adults did. I don't know. I don't know what I thought about it, but as I got older, I was like oh that was about sex. And That Don't Impress Me Much the song is also about sex.

Tiyondah: Oh, yeah. Pretty much every song in mainstream media is about sex. So this is the thing that I don't quite understand about the hold WAP has on the culture, but yeah every song is about sex. It always has been this way. We can delve into why sex is so commercialized but I don't think it is unique to these two women who did an excellent job on this song.

Anne: So one of the things we both wanted to touch on was, what about black non-binary and transgender folks?

Tiyondah: Yeah, absolutely. And I think especially when we are talking about the intersections of identity and how that impacts the kind of support you receive, you know, femininity is very highly valued in how we think about a person who is a victim or a survivor. So this becomes an added challenge for people who identify as trans or non-binary because you have to be seen as a specific person in a specific light to receive the kind of support you need to go through a process. And if people don't understand how the power dynamics for you as a person as a victim or

survivor, typically we are talking about law enforcement, or school supports, that makes it even harder for you to go and ask for support if you know that the people don't understand how violence shows up in your world.

Anne: Ya absolutely. So that is all the questions that we have today. Do you have any last thoughts you want to leave us with about these kinds of racialized and gendered roles that apply to sex and sexuality and sexual violence?

Tiyondah: I think at the end of the day, the difference between having agency and having sexuality being boisted upon you in a ceryain way is about power and that can be power from a racial perspective or gender perspective, and I think when we think about these things and we think about the ways we talk about perpetrators of sexual violence and the ways that we talk about who is on the receiving end of sexual assault and who is portrayed as the "common" perpetrator, we need to think about power within those spaces.

Anne: Beautifully said. And I think that is such an excellent sum up that folks can refer to and reflect on and think about. So thank you so much for visit gus on our podcast today and talking about all of these pop culture examples, these books, I am so excited to be giving away free copies of They Said This Would Be Fun so check out our instagram and I will also share some info of where you can find some of Tiyondah's research.

Tiyondah: Thanks so much for having me.

Transition Music

Anne: So that is our chat with Tiyondah Fante-Coleman. If you want to learn more about the work she's doing you can check out the description of this episode where we will include all of the really awesome links to the links she has been doing and her research. She is an incredible human being and I am so grateful I had the chance to talk to her today. As we mentioned before, if you are a member of the UWindsor community and you need to access support around sexual violence you can reach out to us at svsupport@uwindsor.ca or you can check Or you can check

out our website [uwindsor.ca/sexual assault](http://uwindsor.ca/sexual%20assault). Or if you're not in Windsor, and are in Ontario more broadly, and are looking for sexual violence support, you can check out the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centers, their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca. Remember to like and subscribe folks, and we will see you next week!