

E61: Assumptions are the Mother of All Failures: A Conversation on Boundaries and Allyship **With Tinokuda Bvunzawabaya**

HEATHER DRAGO: Welcome to That's a Hard No, the podcast about learning to say no and set boundaries to live our best lives. I'm your host, Heather Drago. You may think because of this podcast that I'm a boundary setting expert, but I'm not. I'm an expert at struggling to set boundaries, but you know what? I'm working on it and it is getting easier. Follow along with me as I learn from fellow strugglers and experts so that you too can start saying no without feeling fear, guilt, or FOMO.

Today's guest is Tino Kudazawabaya, a black man from the UK with a goal to deconstruct and challenge the gender norms surrounding manhood and masculinity. Boy, does he have an uphill battle. But for real, Tina's quest is so admirable and so needed. Even given the progress we've made for equality in my lifetime, men and women are not treated equally. We still don't make as much in the workplace. We're still more likely to die of preventable diseases. Three times as many women have been victims of assault. So much attention is given to empowering women, and rightfully so. Only 40 years ago, could a woman even apply for a credit card in the U.S. without her husband being present. That being said, men have to be part of the change too, and Tino is working to educate and empower men to be a part of the push for equality. Tino's company, Black and Raw, is committed to helping change the way men think about themselves and each other, to combat toxic masculinity at the source and empower men and boys to be themselves and gain the tools they need to be confident and proud without putting others down. We have a real conversation about gender norms, about race, and about making a difference when and where we can. Hi, Tino. It's so nice to meet you. Thank you so much for coming on That's a Hard No.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: It's all right, Heather. Thank you for having me. I'm excited. I can't wait.

HEATHER DRAGO: Cool. Well, I'm going to start, it might be a little awkward, but I'm going to start with the elephant in the room. And that is, there's a very good likelihood that I will say some well-meaning white lady cringy things while we're talking, because

we're going to talk about some heavy stuff. We're going to talk about gender roles and identity and, masculinity and femininity and all these things. And you and I come from very different backgrounds and different kinds of walks of life. And that's why I wanted to talk to you. I think it's fantastic. I want lots of voices, lots of perspectives here in this space. So I just wanted to put that out there. Just like, bear with me. And if it's too cringy, feel free to correct me.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: No, don't worry. Don't worry. I rate I rate anybody that's wanting to understand different perspectives.

HEATHER DRAGO: So I think I think conversations where good things start. Right? Yeah, definitely. Yeah. So let's just start with a question. Like, I know that you are working to help men and black men in particular evolve past toxic masculinity to be their best selves. So let's start with defining what you think toxic masculinity is and how you're going about that.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: So. I guess, you know what the word sort of toxic, like toxic masculinity. I don't know. I feel like it's thrown around quite a lot lately. And I feel like there probably are instances where, you know, like obviously we're seeing people like Andrew Tate and other influencers like that, that are sort of influencing young men and young boys who, who I think are lost right now. I think there is a lot of Who am I supposed to be? How am I supposed to show up in the world? And, you know, don't get me wrong, feminism is amazing. It is great that we're seeing women in the workplace. It's great that we're seeing female bosses and, you know, that women have more choices these days. But I think coming with that, I think there has, there has been a change in roles of women. And therefore there's an automatic change in roles of men. I think men are still expected to be breadwinners, but then at the same time, your wife can be earning more than you. So as a man, how do you deal with, I should be the breadwinner, but my wife is earning more than me, or how, how can I, you know, if my wife is earning more than me, my gosh, what do I bring? And I think a lot of men are struggling with that. And with the okay, the nuances of it all. So I guess I don't even know how I'd sort of define Tosca masculinity. But what I would say is that masculinity and what men should be is ever evolving and ever changing. And that's what we need to be able to adapt to those changes. You know, it's evolution. You know, if you don't adapt, you die. Right. And I think maybe we're seeing a dying breed of the old version of what masculinity is into what is going to be. And we can always talk about more what I think a new version of masculinity looks like.

HEATHER DRAGO: Before we get to defining, you know, a new version of masculinity, I want to pick up on what you mentioned in that you feel men and boys are lost. And I think that's true. And I'm wondering if it's because men and boys. weren't necessarily

given maybe what people call the soft skills to know how to talk about these things or how to think about these things or how to perceive themselves or get help about certain things. Like, I'm wondering if, if you feel the same way.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, I 100% agree on that because I think we've had so like our fathers like my father, absolutely lovely man, but he, I think for him, our generation of men sort of you know, I guess generation of young people in well, not just men, because you know, men have daughters. And they are talking about their issues, they are talking about things they are not necessarily answering back to their parents, but they know what they want. And they make that very clear. So I think there's sort of been a gap where the men of older generation were raised by men that were stoic, that were breadwinners, that were, you know, this stereotypical version of what a man is. And they weren't they if they weren't shown the skills of what we require of men today, it's hard for them one to have those skills, but also then to impart those skills onto their children. And so, you know, my dad was born in the 70s and women's rights and all of that way you make me feel old. Okay, continue. But yeah, but yeah, so, you know, women's rights and so everything was changing around that time. So maybe they weren't given the tools and the skills and the knowledge to be able to impart that onto their children, where I think that's now where our our boys, our men are getting lost because their dads find it really hard to have these soft skills to have this emotional intelligence to you know, all right, just because you aren't the biggest earner in the house. That doesn't mean you can't clean the home. That doesn't mean you can't do childcare. And it's not helping out your wife. It's taking your responsibilities as a man. and that wasn't your dad's responsibilities to do childcare. But listen, two people work in the household now, you know, we have this thing called the second shift where women are going out into the workplace and then coming home and doing childcare. And for them, that's, I'm not saying it's a huge burden, but yo, it's long two jobs.

HEATHER DRAGO: I mean, physically it is. Yeah. And brain power wise it is. Yeah, for sure. Exactly.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: So that's where now, our generation of men need to start developing these skills. And it's, I don't know, I don't know where I don't know where we're gonna end up going. Like, I think, you know, when I'm a dad, I think I've been practicing a lot of these skills. So I'm going to be able to impart these onto my children. But there are men that haven't done the work to do that. So are they going to be parenting their children how their dad parented them? Probably. So I still think it's something where there might be still a bit of tension between what is a new man and what have I been shown?

HEATHER DRAGO: Yeah. So let's go there. What do you think is the is the new more enlightened version of masculinity?

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: So I think at the end of the day, you've just got to be a good human, right? You just got to be a good person. And what and what does being a good person means? I think it means being responsible. It means being accountable, having integrity, trying to live an honest life trying to spread joy spread light wherever you go. And some of those are the softer skills which as men were maybe not good at in terms of talking about our emotions. And we're gonna talk about boundaries later setting your boundaries clear. Do you know what your boundaries are? A lot of these questions which we never really had to think about and maybe sometimes when you're communicating your boundaries, you've seen your pet you've seen your dad communicate his boundaries. in maybe an aggressive way, but maybe for your dad, that was the only way he knew how to communicate his feelings. And so I think a new man is someone that is being adaptable and being able to change with the ways but also adding all of those soft skills to your arsenal. And the thing is, I don't wanna throw away what masculinity has been before, because it still serves a purpose now. I think as men, I think everybody can be leaders, but I think leadership is very associated with men. And that's what our fathers were doing, that's what fathers before them were doing. lead that there's nothing wrong with that. But you can lead in a way where you hear everybody's opinion. And you make a collective choice. That doesn't mean just because someone else is like, Oh, I disagree with you. I think you're wrong on this. Okay, tell me why I'm wrong on this. Let's figure out a way in which we can do this. And then let's make a decision together. Some people be like, well, that's not leadership. But I think it is leadership because you're able to pull together what everybody is thinking and make a decision that is best for everybody in that situation. And being a new man is embracing all those things. I think one thing which I don't sort of, you know, I keep mentioning Andrew Tate, but that's just because he's sort of the biggest figure out there really in all of this. we shouldn't be degrading our women we shouldn't be saying women should be back in the kitchen and you need to take your rightful place as a man and if you don't do this you're not manly if you don't do this you're not manly like come off it mate come on that is not a healthy discussion that's not a healthy way to raise boys we shouldn't be having a scarcity of women you know, we should be building each other up. Like we're going to have a much better world if we're building each other up. Listen, why not try and bring us all together? And yeah, I don't, I don't personally, I don't see, I don't see any value in treating people with less respect at all, because it doesn't lead to better relationships. It doesn't lead to a better society either.

HEATHER DRAGO: Yeah, I 100% agree with you. And it's funny, as I'm listening to you, I'm fascinated because I was raised by two women. And so my grandmother was divorced, raised her two children, one of whom was my mother, who then raised me. My

parents divorced when I was an infant. I never had any experience of a man in the household until I got married. And so it was like living with an alien. What was it like? What was it like? My, I mean, I've been married almost 28 years now and we've been together maybe over 30 years and he is the love of my life. He's a wonderful guy. He's very kind, very funny, very smart. Um, he's also very stubborn, very stoic. Um, he's only now getting to the point where he can really talk to me about some things like, you know, and then that's, and looking at his father, like it makes total sense, you know? Um, And he's such a good person, and we're so much on the same page about so many things that like, yeah, sure, we've struggled, but just like every other long-term couple. But we're coming from a place of mutual respect, and so even if we're mad for a couple days at each other, we eventually figure it out. But what's funny is, especially in our younger, earlier days, there was a lot more head-butting especially when it came to parenting because I was raised by two women who had a certain approach, a certain kind of talk everything through and everything's very warm and fuzzy and, and things that I think were just, I would take for granted as normal, he would not necessarily agree. And so there was just a lot, just literally this like communication style and, you know, he was raised in a very traditional nuclear, two parents, kids in the house, mom stayed at home, you know, and I came from a completely different world. And so figuring out how to make those things, um, merge peacefully was a challenge. And luckily my mother-in-law was the best mother-in-law in the entire world. She was the greatest person and I could call her and just be like, here son is, you know, And she wouldn't take his side. She would be like Give me some some tips of how to handle it because I just would like this was like a like a alien being in my house, you know, so it's just really interesting to me to hear your point of view in terms of like what is handed down generation to generation because I've seen it to a degree. Luckily, my father-in-law is a fantastic human being, and so he raised a fantastic person. But, you know, everyone is imperfect in their perfect ways. And, you know, we inherit habits and traits and, you know, so.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Can I add something on to that just so please do please do. I think when you're saying everyone's sort of imperfectly imperfect. I think as men, there's always been this thing of, you've got to seem perfect. You've got to seem like you have everything put together. You can't cry.

HEATHER DRAGO: You're not letting that facade down.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, that stoic facade and just being like now I've got everything in the bag, but I think where connection meets is that vulnerability. And you can sort of be, you know, you can be that that can be a barrier, isn't it? And sort of that connection. You know, I've been in relationships where someone's been like, you don't

share as much as I do. And that and that was sort of a thing. And, you know, like, I'm like, not nowhere near perfect. I my communication skills have sort of grown as I've been in different relationships. But there is still that part where you're like, Oh no, I don't, I don't want to admit weakness. I don't want to admit that sort of, you know, facade. So I, but I think that is what a new man should be being able to do should be being able to start to do is like, listen, it's okay to be vulnerable. It's okay to cry. It's okay to say, I need help because we all need help every now and then.

HEATHER DRAGO: I don't know if you have this commercial over where you are, but we have this commercial here where there's a guy working out in a gym and he's like trying to lift this huge amount of weights and he doesn't have a spotter and it's like on his chest. He's like, oh, and there's a guy going, dude, let me help you. And he's like, no, no, you don't know my father. You don't know my family. I can't accept help. It's so good. I love that. Very good. You know, it's like we have we tell each we tell ourselves these things of like, if I reach out for help, if I admit there's a problem. If I admit I need something, you know, what are others going to think of me? You know?

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, definitely.

HEATHER DRAGO: So some of these inherited, like things we learn from our parents, our grandparents, from society around us, is there another kind of layer of difficulty when it comes to black men and black society?

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, so I think in terms of like black communities and black societies, you know, there is that sort of, that facade of still sort of keeping everything together and making sure that, you know, you're the boss and, you know, you've kept all your household together and sort of, you know, admitting defeat or failure sort of isn't an option. And I think why it's maybe a bit different in black society you know, black people and mental health is something which doesn't often get talked about enough. And it's something which you're sort of just expected to put up and shut up with. Whereas like, no, actually your brain chemistry right now is completely different. It's not something which necessarily you can always control and circumstances can put that weight on you. And when we talk about racial bias and injustice and you know, the trauma of, being in racialized societies, that is something which I think is very hard to verbalize the impact. You know, when George Floyd got killed, I didn't I think I watched maybe a minute of the video. Because I personally for me, it was horrific. And I don't need to know that black men are being killed in the US in the UK. I don't need to know Like when you find out more about those things, one, it just makes you really, really angry, makes you really upset and really frustrated. And sometimes you just feel like I can't do anything about this. And that's not always a healthy place to be in. I think

being aware of those things are really good. And for me, I listen to podcasts. I will sometimes read different article journals and stuff like that, but I won't watch the news. The news one is mainly made to entertain rather than educate. It's given the flashes and the nuggets of, oh, what's going to catch people's eye? What's going to do this? What's going to do that? What's going to make people really worry? What's going to bring fear? that does not help in that sort of racialized trauma. And, you know, we were talking earlier about traits which have been passed down and, you know, you've got intergenerational trauma and if you've got dads and fathers who have been who have been sort of say something's happened with the police or they've experienced police brutality of the experience racial trauma, those things will pass down to their children unconsciously. And you won't even know. And maybe that's why your dad is reserved because he's seen a lot of things. And it's very fearful. And I don't know.

HEATHER DRAGO: And I guess the only way hypervigilance is justified.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, it definitely is.

HEATHER DRAGO: Absolutely. Yeah.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: And so, but then I think, which is really unfortunate, is that those men that have experienced that, then don't talk about it, then don't go to therapy about it, then don't process it, which then just gets put down, or then get shown in anger outbursts, which gets shown in different behaviours to cope with it, destructive behaviours to cope with it, rather than going to those things which are just deemed, you know, yogas or like yogas usually deemed as a white person's thing, you know what I mean? Like how white people talk about the issues, like we don't do that. But it's not a racialized thing. And we've had different forms of therapy. When we were back in communities, people would talk and we'd be together and we'd be around a fire. We've become very individualized as a society. So you have to access those things like therapy or even like men's groups or even doing a sport where you can just get it out and be around others and just chat, get your frustrations out. So yeah, I think that's sort of, I guess, the uniqueness of it and how it plays.

HEATHER DRAGO: A lot of pressure, a lot of pressure Black men are walking around with. Here in America, everyone brings up George Floyd, and rightly so. I always think about here in Cleveland, there's a young man named Tamir Rice, who was shot by Cleveland police, and he's 13 years old. you know, as a mother, I see these young men as, you know, these are young boys. These are boys like, or, or they're young men or there's someone's brother, someone's mother, someone's father, whatever. Like I just, they're just human beings. And I just feel like I, as a society, I wish we could just say, no,

this is not normal. This is just not, it's like, it's so painful. We've just kind of, as you say, become numb to it and it's become a normal thing.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, I mean, you can't think about it too much, you know what I mean? True, I mean, it'll take over your life if you'll... Yeah, but it is unfortunate that that's sort of what it's come to. And I guess at the end of the day, though, you've also got to protect your sense of peace because if we're constantly consuming these things, constantly involved in them, and it's good to be involved in them, it's good to bring noise, to bring... bring these voices, bring these stories across, but you've got to be able to pull yourself away and have things in place that can sort of send to you and be, and like, you can be present in the moment. Like you can, you can just be so angry at things. Like, you know, we talk about politics. I do not like the Tories in this country, in this country. And they are, unfortunately, they are sort of playing on these culture wars and stuff like that and about immigrants. And, you know, it's really upsetting because at the end of the day, England would not be the country it is without immigrants. It just wouldn't. That's true, yeah. We were joking today, one of my friends at work comes from Turkey, he came from Turkey, and he's like, oh, I've only had a curry, like, twice since I've been here. And I was like, Oh, man, that's England's national dish.

HEATHER DRAGO: Come on, what are you doing? It is. Right? That's the national dish. Yeah, yeah.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: And you know, it was made by a man in Scotland. And it's like that sort of but that like, that's it. That's Indian culture that's flavoured in here. That's China, Chinese cultures flavoured in the African, you know, all all different countries and continents and people. It's just a shame that we've got to a place where it's being weaponized, and that's just really unfortunate to see.

HEATHER DRAGO: Yeah. But I do hear you saying, like, you do have to be mindful and intentional about how much of this information you consume, and when to pull back and find ways to channel your energies in other ways, in more of a self-care way. Yeah. Right? And on that note, we're going to take a quick break. We'll be back in a minute. I adored this conversation with Tino. Despite how serious the topics were, I was blown away at how positive a person he is. His smile is infectious and his positivity is encouraging. We touch on race more specifically in the second half of our conversation and talk about how to be an ally and empower people to set boundaries for themselves around race and gender. We talked a little bit about, you know, what men teach each other generationally and traits we inherit and all those kinds of things, things we learn, things we unlearn. A lot of things that are learned are stereotypes, and it's really hard to break some of those or help people unlearn them. So tell me what your thoughts are

about stereotypes and how we can get people past them, how we can educate people. go. So go, it's a big topic.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: loaded loaded question. Yeah. stereotypes. Yeah, that is a huge one. And I think a lot of a lot of stereotypes can be sort of quite harmful to people. And I was like, the Turkish friend who I was talking about, we were chatting. And he was like, What do you think on stereotypes? Like, And I think my point sort of where I was coming from is that, you know, sometimes when you're with your mates and you're just hanging out and say you've got your white friend and a black friend or a mixed race and somebody and he was Turkish and his friend was mixed race and they'll sort of make jokes. I had a guy at school and it was there was there weren't many black people and he was mixed race. So I think I called him caramel, chocolate or something along those lines. But me and him were cool. So like, there are sort of stereotypes and maybe phrases that people throw around where if you've got like interpersonal relationships, it's sort of used in a bit of a bantery way. But the stereotypes, which I think are the most harmful ones, are the ones where you don't have that interpersonal relationship with somebody. where you are just viewing somebody from whatever you've been exposed to in the media or whatever you've been exposed to by your parents and really The way to combat them is through those interpersonal relationships is through getting to know somebody as they are, you know, like there's a stereotype that black people love watermelon that black people love chicken, you know, or was it I think it was Boris Johnson that said black people with watermelon smiles. That's awful. That's and he became my prime minister. Can you believe that he was calling I remember him.

HEATHER DRAGO: He's a dude that got stuck on the line the zip line. Yeah, like an idiot waving little flag.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, I'm glad that's what you remember about him. Anyway, he called Muslim women letterboxes. And, you know, we also saw rise in, you know, hate crimes. And so when we've got people in power that are using these stereotypes to define people, that's really harmful. And that doesn't allow for an understanding of that person. Why do women, why do Muslim women wear hijabs? you know, when you call someone a letterbox, you don't even get to that point. You're dismissing them as humans, yeah. Yeah, because there's a reason why they're wearing a hijab. There's a reason why they are Muslim. And guess what? If you sat down and talked to them, you'd find out so much more. I think coming to an understanding of this person is just a person, this person is just a human, what is different about them. Their differences make them great. Like all of our differences make us great and unique. And it's really about finding out who that person is. You know, I don't know. I don't know if

you've watched. I don't know. I don't know if you're like a comic book fan or anything. No, I might be.

HEATHER DRAGO: Oh, I, I live with three comic book nerds. One of whom is about to earn her bachelor of fine art or their bachelor of fine arts as a comic illustrator. So yeah, we're, we're mostly a Marvel. No, no, I take that back. Oh my gosh. I'm going to get in so much trouble. We're mostly a DC household with a touch of Marvel and a whole lot of independence. Yeah. I'm going to be in big trouble now. Anyway, so go.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: So there was a show called Arrow, which I absolutely love.

HEATHER DRAGO: Oh, yeah.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: We watched that Deathstroke. And it came back. I think it was like season six or five or something. And he was like to Oliver Queen. Oh, assumptions are the mother of all failures. That has always stuck with me. And the way he said it was so cool and everything else like that. Manu Bennett was great. And that I was like, man, I've really tried to sort of take that into everything that I do in life because we always assume we always make assumptions. And I think stereotypes are sort of racially loaded assumptions about a person. Oh, can you say it again?

HEATHER DRAGO: Assumptions are the

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Mothers of all failures.

HEATHER DRAGO: Okay, that's the title of the episode. Noah, that's the title. You just coined the title. That's good. I love it. Assumption of the mother of all failures. Very good.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, so right. Yeah. So stereotypes, that's what I'd say they're loaded racial assumptions about a person. And if you get past that point of those assumptions, and just start asking questions, stop being genuine and start actually wanting to understand who this person is in front of you. I think that's the way we sort of get rid of these stereotypes and You know, you find out and it you know what I love finding out about people's stories. Like one reason why I do a podcast because I love finding out about people's stories and the nuances of it. And you know, there's a reason why I love sitting in a sauna in the morning because you get to talk to people and find out about their stories about their lives. And that is personally where I think assumptions and stereotypes can be dismantled.

HEATHER DRAGO: I think one of the dangers of society right now, especially since the pandemic, is that we're all living in these little homogenous bubbles. And so in America, I always hear these politicians say, the American people care about blah, blah, blah, or the American people want us to blah, blah, blah, whatever. And every time I think, which American people are you talking about? Who are you imagining in your brain? Is it someone who looks like you? Or are you imagining the melting pot? And when I was a kid, we had this, I don't know if you had Schoolhouse Rock over in the UK. We had this anime, like Saturday morning cartoon series. And it was lessons like, you know, they had things about grammar and spelling and math, but they also had stuff about civics. Right. And there was this really great song all about the American melting pot. And it was a thing that there was a pride to it and it was taught in grammar school. Like we all learned like that is the thing that makes America great is where this great American melting pot, right? And now it's the tone and the garbage you hear being spouted on media and by politicians is completely opposite to that. And I'm like, what happened? Like, where did that go? Because that was what made us special, you know?

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: No, I know you're right. It's it definitely is what makes it is what makes those countries is what makes America special. It's what makes the UK special makes it's whatever is what makes every country special because everybody has immigrants. Everybody has different people in their continent is never just homogenous. undefined: Yeah.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: And, you know, imagine if you didn't have Chinese people here in the UK, then what then where would you get your Chinese, you know, in America, Mexican food, food is huge, where would you get all those flavors? And, you know, if it was just English food, like, boring, eels all day gross.

HEATHER DRAGO: I don't understand the eels. Um, but yeah, so I think I started to cut in because I was all excited about, I think what you're saying about like, get to know people on an individual level, get outside of your bubble, you know, interact with people. Um, not to compare this totally different realm, like, you know, not doing a me too thing, but My, I, I, I was raised by the Lebanese side of my family. My grandmother was one of 10 very poor family and of Lebanese people. And they established themselves. They lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which is made up at the time in the early 1900s was all blonde Swedish people. And so these dark skinned, dark haired people were treated very, very badly. And that stuck with my grandmother her whole life. And eventually she became a social activist, a peace activist, you know, social justice commentator, writer, warrior or whatever. And because that was so traumatizing. Right. And so I, I got to learn from that. And, and, and But weirdly, like one of her siblings, I'm

originally from Southern California, which is, so talk about a melting pot. There's people from all over the world, from Asia and Mexico and everything. And my aunt was complaining about Korean drivers one day. And I was like, you do realize you're an immigrant, right? Like, are you kidding me? Like, and so I feel like even the most enlightened of us, those of us who have experienced, intolerance or prejudice, we can still fall back into that ignorant place, right? And so it's up to all of us to learn about each other.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: You're not alone, honestly. Like I say, black people can be some of the most racist people ever. we all have we all have been through things. And it's not about comparing. It's just about understanding. And, you know, there's space, there's space for everybody here, like, you know, and in England, in England, at least, and maybe the same reason in America, I do think there is a conversation to be had about immigration. And controlled immigration or however you see that. But I think for us here in the UK, like I said, don't get political. I always love to get political. our government has not built the capacity to taking all these influx of new people and everyone blames that on the migrants but guess what if we had enough houses for if we had enough houses for the people even on this island which we don't then the problem wouldn't be as exacerbated if we had But if we had better schools, if we had more spaces, more youth clubs, if we had a better NHS, like all these things of all migrants are coming into the country and are flooding our system. And the words which are used are just awful. But It's not, it's the fact that we haven't built the capacity to have all these people in. So yes, it seems like it's all their fault, but you know, if you've got a dam and it's starting to overflow, you don't blame the water that's come, do you? You blame that, oh, we didn't make the dam big enough. We didn't allow for all the extra water. Like, so why are we blaming people that are escaping awful situations and wanting a better life? and you know when they come here they're some of the most hard working people they're some of the people they're the people that are cleaning homes they're the people that are doctors nurses carers they're the people that help the countries tick and run and why are we treating these people like they're less than human why are we using words which show that they're less than human that To me, it's just sickening personally. But I'm not going to continue to rant because we won't get anywhere.

HEATHER DRAGO: Yeah, I hear you. I feel like a lot of politicians plan for the country they wish they had some imaginary country rather than facing what they really are dealing with and what's coming. So a lot of short sighted thinking. Let's go from one light subject to another light subject. Let's talk about prison reform.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: I want to pose a question back to you quickly. What are prisons for? What is the purpose of prisons in society?

HEATHER DRAGO: Oh boy, I'm right there with you. It should be rehabilitation, right? It should be. And I don't know what people think it's for here now. It's like vendetta. It's revenge. Warehousing? I mean, it's just the, the, yeah, money. Yeah. Like there are, there are, yeah, for-profit companies running these things. So what incentive do they have to rehabilitate people and get them out of the system?

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: don't do that. Realistically, the incentive is to bring them back in and keep and you know, in prisons, they are also making furniture and they're doing all these things, which are then going, which are then given the prison's money and it's going to society and they're making money off it. but the people in prison aren't, well, not, I wouldn't say they're not benefiting from it because I think there is a place for, you know, getting them into workplaces, getting them using their hands.

HEATHER DRAGO: Job skills, sure.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, job skills, yeah, definitely. But it's everything else that's around it, you know? I think we have people in prison who have been through really traumatic things in their lives. and you and if i was in that position or if you were in that position or whoever was in their position and we'd been through all their life circumstances would we necessarily be any different would we necessarily be any better off and i had some stats actually which i which i wanted to share which i thought would be quite interesting um so in the UK in 2021 to 2022 24.9% of offenders who were released went back to re-offend okay and then in the US has the highest rates in the world some of the highest rate in the world with 44% of criminals released returning to prison within their first year out what does that tell you it doesn't work

HEATHER DRAGO: Yeah, and there's all kinds of other things besides just the system itself. It's, you know, while you're in prison, but there's like the there are people who can't afford to pay bail. The bail system is ridiculous. And then, you know, they end up weight lingering in jail just because they can't afford to pay for bail.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: So yeah, it's really unfortunate that the systems are built for people to just end up going back inside, right? You know, if we had systems which, I guess, treated prisoners with some human decency. I was reading something about Norway's prison system. And, you know, Norway, never been before, but I've heard it's a lovely country and their prisons look really luxurious. Like they treat their prisoners and they don't even want to use the word prisoners in this discussion we're talking about, but they treat people in prison like they're actual humans. And someone said in Norway, the punishment is to take away someone's liberty. the other right stay. And in prison, when people go, we take away everything, we take away their rights, we

treat them like animals, we treat them less than human. And we don't give them the skills to be able to go back into society and actually reintegrate. If someone has always struggled with their mental health, and they've lived in really poor conditions all their life, and they go to prison, and it probably gets worse, their mental health, they probably don't have anything that is helping them with that or manage that or struggle that. And you know, some drugs these days are filled with drugs, prisons these days are filled with drugs. So then they might be using something to cope with their situation. All right. Bang, you're released. Well done. You're now free. Oh my gosh. Amazing. Where am I going to stay? Where am I going to live? Who am I going to be around? What situations am I going to be when I get back? probably all the same situation. So what are you doing to help people that are coming out of prisons and trying to, you know, rehabilitate their lives? You've kept them in a cell sometimes for 23 hours and they haven't got daylight and they haven't been able to shower there. That's treating people like animals. How can you expect someone who you have treated less than human to go out back into the world and treat everybody else humanly, humanely? You're setting people up for failure at that point, personally, so. I think prisons, I think we need to have, I think we need to have hard discussions about what the role of prisons is within our society. And I understand it's not a sexy topic, right? People at the end of the day are in prison sometimes because they've committed a crime, which has impacted somebody's life. That is serious. Sometimes people are in prison for things which they really shouldn't be in prison for either. But If we are actually wanting to make our society better, if we're actually wanting to help people, if we're actually wanting, you know, our society to be a better society, let's start helping those people who are usually the most vulnerable actually thrive when they come out. and you know that might be with better mental health programs in prison, with more staff in prison, with smaller prisons, with trauma-informed prison practitioners, you know, like, understanding the circumstances of people that go inside, and you actually being able to sit one to one with them, or even have small groups where maybe they can do yoga, maybe they can do meditation, maybe they have a basketball team, you know, I guess, sort of reflecting society enough within the prison. And reflecting society enough within a prison where when they go out, everything isn't just like, Oh my gosh, what is this? I'm back here now. I'm back in the same place. And having support systems outside of prison that actually help people reintegrate back into society. Yeah, those are just my rambling thoughts, I guess, on prison reform.

HEATHER DRAGO: Well, well said. I totally agree. So this podcast is supposed to be about boundaries, and I think we've really touched on it throughout this conversation. But I wanted to talk a little bit about allyship. And I know when I when I started our conversation saying there's going to be some well-meaning white lady cringe. I'm aware of a lot of well-meaning people like myself wanting to be better, wanting to do better,

wanting to have conversations with people, but then it turning into a you know, they talk to their black friends or whatever, and they're like, tell me, what's it like? You know, or they're kind of putting the onus on the black person or a Jewish person or a Muslim person or whoever, right? To teach me, like, and I feel like that can be exhausting, I'm sure. So I guess I just wanted to talk about Like boundaries in relation to conversations with people from different walks of life and boundaries you set when it comes to society and like make ensuring that you get the self-respect or not the self-respect, the respect you deserve from others.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, no, that's no, that's all right. No, that's perfect. And, you know, I think at the end of the day, right, like I said, we started off this conversation. I started off when you were saying, I'm going to say some cringy white lady stuff. You haven't said any cringy white lady stuff. So you're good on that part. But I think people that are willing to engage in these sort of types of conversations I told my work, I told people at my work that I do a podcast and one of my managers who's a, he's a middle-aged white guy, he started listening to them and then like, and it's really weird someone being in, coming into the office they'd be like, yo I heard your podcast the other week and I was like, oh you know, usually people don't tell me that they're listening. But I think he's got some, he's found like some really interesting perspectives and conversations from it. And I think listening to diverse groups of voices is probably your first step. And I know a lot of people after George Floyd, bought books on anti racism and um you know how to how to understand the apply to black people even more and i think those are also really great starting points but i think being able to be uncomfortable in a conversation where you don't where you don't not that you don't belong but that you feel like you're oh should i have a say on this should i be able to even be in this conversation, being uncomfortable in those places is going to help you understand a lot more about the plight of people. And we talked about dismantling stereotypes. And I think that works really well with it. Because at the end of the day, if you're talking to somebody as a person and finding out who that person is, you're already going to start sort of doing that work of being more of an ally and being someone that actually is trying to understand rather than it sort of being a tokenistic thing and being like oh you know be like black power and you know free palestine and you know but actually talking to people that are going through it and understanding And understanding their worldview, I think is only going to then help you be more of an ally. And maybe when you see somebody saying racist remarks or being stereotypical, you're more likely to be like, yo, nah, come on. One, that's not cool. But two, You know that person who you talked to who was a Muslim and you're like, whoa, no, that's not what they're like. I know this guy and I have a really great relationship with him. And you're not even talking about the race, you're talking about the person, right? undefined: Yeah.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: So I think that's where I think that's, that's how people can be allies in just finding out the stories and listening to diverse perspectives and diverse people. Because, you know, we're saying everyone's quite homogenous and that we are quite siloed, you know, I imagine if Trump or if Boris Johnson, like actually sat down with a group of immigrants and actually heard their stories, I would like to think they'd probably be like, oh, oh, I feel a bit crap. I'd like to think that. I'd like to think they'd be like, oh, you know, maybe I shouldn't be calling these people less than animals because they're actually just people.

HEATHER DRAGO: Yeah, yeah. And that's what I was talking about before when I was like, you know, when they say the American people, which American people are you talking about? Like, I like what you're saying about get to know people on a human level, like expand your world a little bit, listen to some other voices. I think that is where it begins.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, definitely. And at that point, you said there would be respect. Yeah, there would be respect because you'd be like, yo, actually, you've had all these things against you. And you're still where you're at now.

HEATHER DRAGO: Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely. So, okay. So, um, I totally agree. This has been such a great conversation. I feel like we delved into heavy, some heavy topics, but, um, stuff I think about a lot and I really appreciate sort of like the really honest conversation about it. And, um, I love what you're doing. I love, this was very heavy, but like your social media is really fun. I saw the one where you were like yelling at men for asking their mom to iron their shirt. What are you doing? What are you a child? You know, um, your stuff's really fun. And, um, I, I appreciate the positivity you're putting out there and the, the way you're kind of bringing people with you, um, as you learn how to become your better self and help other men become their better selves. Is there anything you want to tell people about like what you're doing, where you're at, how people can connect with you?

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, so the podcast, the Black and Royal podcast, you can listen to it anywhere you listen to podcasts, website www.blackandroyal.co.uk, you can check out my stuff there. It's something where I really wanted to grow as a community. And I've sort of been on and off with like doing online community groups and stuff like that. But I'm gonna sort of be bringing those back in because that was also an important element of it in terms of having black men and having men come around and just talk to each other. And if you want to follow me on socials at Tino talk 25 tick tock Instagram, Twitter. I mainly use tick tock and Instagram. I was never really a Twitter

guy. So Twitter is always a bit like I don't really know what to say on Twitter or what to do.

HEATHER DRAGO: So yeah, Instagram. Yeah, I've stopped. I stopped that one a long time ago. Too much yelling.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: And that is called x. Yeah, sorry.

HEATHER DRAGO: Sorry. Yeah, no. I have many thoughts there. Okay, well, I mean, it's been a delight. I really enjoyed this conversation. So great to finally meet you. I know we've been looking forward to having you on for a while. So I would love to continue the conversation and and you know, let's stay in touch.

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Anytime, Heather, anytime. So yeah, I'd love to. I really enjoyed this. Like I said before, I think everyone enjoys being interviewed. So I just, I'd really enjoyed talking about these topics. And, you know, you saw me get a bit riled up. That wasn't even that much riled up, but.

HEATHER DRAGO: Well, you know, it's always good to be passionate about things, right? That's what drives us forward, right?

TINOKUDA BVUNZAWABAYA: Yeah, definitely. Thank you for having me.

HEATHER DRAGO: Okay, so that's it for now. Thanks for listening. That's A Hard No is a production of Clever Girl Marketing, my little agency in Cleveland, in partnership with our friends at Evergreen Podcasts. Many thanks to our amazing team, including Laura Del Rosario, our production and marketing coordinator, Noah Fouts, our amazing producer, editor, and composer, who wrote our theme music and performed it with his band, The Big Leagues. and our new video producer and editor Kay Holmberg. You can find show notes and resources on our website, and you can find other fun stuff on our socials. We're Hard No Podcast, and we're now on YouTube, so check us out there. Make sure to like and subscribe on your favorite listening platforms, but especially Apple. Can you please do us a favor? Give us a rating and review so more people can find us and learn how to say no. So until next time, thanks for listening. And remember, saying no isn't just okay. Saying no is key to living an authentic, fulfilling life. So do it. Find your no and say it with me.