

MEGHAN: About two years ago, my husband and I went to have a socially distanced dinner with another couple. Actually, it was just drinks because this was when there was still so much uncertainty with COVID. We followed all the rules and we met friends at a distance. And while it was great to just have human interaction again. An even greater moment happened as we were leaving. The wife handed me a book that she said she thought I might find interesting. I thanked her. I put it in my purse, only really having a chance to skim through it once I arrived back home.

And when I did. I was actually shocked. *Did you know this?* I kept nudging my husband, as we were sitting there in bed – And what I was referring to was what I was learning in this incredible book. The title of which, by the way – is *Algorithms of Oppression* – by internet studies scholar, Safiya Noble. And in the book, Noble pointed out what she'd found in this research study, to better understand how the digital age shaped our perception of each other. Especially of women. And specifically of women of color. Her findings in this book had my jaw on the floor.

She established that when you type in a question on the Google search engine, it would, as we've all seen before with autofill, try to guess what your question will be.

SFX OF TYPING

Sort of like the modern day technological Madlib. So to fill in the blank, to be intuitive for you, when she typed in *why are black women so...* the autofill from the computer, the machine, trying to guess your thoughts, maybe shape your thoughts. Completed her search with these options: *Why are black women so loud? Why are black women so mean? And why are black women so angry?* Those were the seeds being planted. This idea that a black woman must be angry, an angry black woman, when we all know that sometimes things make you feel angry or sad or hurt or upset. And that's not a gender or racially specific feeling. Yet, this trope of the angry black woman, it persists. And as we saw in this book. It was being reinforced constantly in ways we hadn't even realized. And from that I started to dig deeper. Where does this idea even come from? Why has it been attributed to black women? And how do some black women cower from it? Lean into it? Or sometimes even play into it.

And on that last point, I knew just who I wanted to talk to.

Meghan: Well, here we are.

Ziwe: Hello.

Meghan: Hello and hello. Well, first, do you want to start by introducing yourself?

Ziwe: Yes. Hello. My name is Ziwe, of Showtime's *Ziwe*. And I'm happy to be here today.

I was incredibly excited to sit down with Ziwe – a Nigerian-American comedian, actress, and writer.

Meghan: I just had my genealogy done a couple of years ago.

Ziwe: What - What are you?

Meghan: 43% Nigerian.

Ziwe: No way! Na wah oh! Ja wah oh! Oh, my gosh. Are you really serious?

Meghan: Yeah!

Ziwe: Oh, this is huge! Igbo, Yoruba, do we know?

Meghan: So, I mean, I'm going to start to dig deeper into all of this because anyone that I've told, especially Nigerian women, are just like what!

Ziwe: This is huge for our community. No, honestly, you do look like a Nigerian, you look like my aunt Uzo. So this is great.

Meghan: Oh my goodness. Uzo.

Ziwe: Shout out.

Here's the thing about Ziwe - I found her to be incredibly bubbly, warm, and inviting in our conversation setting... but with the persona that she puts on apparently that's not a universal feeling...she'll tell you.

Ziwe: Usually when I'm talking to an interviewer, the first thing that they say to me is I'm terrified of you.

Meghan:: Really?

Ziwe: Yeah really. I'm like, Oh my God, that hurts my feelings. I'm a sensitive Pisces. Like, I don't want you to be scared of me. That's not my goal.

I mean look, if you've seen her work, you *may* be able to understand why, for some people, she can inspire fear in an interview setting. In the early days of the pandemic, Ziwe skyrocketed to fame with *Baited* – a series on Instagram Live – of mostly interviews – that made people feel... (clears throat) *uncomfortable*, shall we say. Her guests would come on thinking it was just some little internet show – she was professional, she was poised, composed... and then... she would just throw these curveballs out that her guests were definitely not ready for.

IG LIVE SHOW INTV CLIP

Ziwe: *How many black friends do you have, Caroline?*

Caroline: *Um very many. So many. As Donald Trump would say, I - a huge amount of black friends! That's why my Instagram grid looks so black.*

BAITED SHOW CLIP

Ziwe: So as an attractive white woman, how much free stuff do you get on the daily?

White Woman: None!

Ziwe: You haven't gotten anything for free in your white life?

White Woman: Yeah! I mean...pens?

Ziwe: You get pens for free? That's the most you're getting out of your white privilege is free pens?

White Woman: No that's not the most -

Ziwe: Come on, work harder!

[LAUGH HERE] So as you can see, Ziwe's approach can be... shall we say *intense* for some people. But according to Ziwe, she's just doing what a lot of white men in her field do all the time...

Ziwe: When you think of Howard Stern and like Stephen Colbert or Andy Cohen, and that's kind of their interview style. Like I pull from them. So when I get that comment, I, you know, I'm in my, in my head, I'm like, ah, in real life, I'm like, I'm so sorry. I try not to be scary.

Meghan: Isn't that so funny?

Ziwe: It's terrible.

Meghan: How does it make you feel inside when it happens?

Ziwe: How does it make me feel to instill terror in people? // Horrible! // I mean, that's why I wear pink. That's why my character is so hyper feminine. It's because it's sort of like it codifies like the message of the show I think. Like, it's like Barbie packaging. And then you, you bite into the sandwich and it's like barbed wire.

Meghan: Do you think that the character plays into archetypes or pushes against them?

Ziwe: I think she fundamentally plays into archetypes. Yeah. She, I mean—

Meghan: By design—

Ziwe: By design, because well, honestly, think about it like, I grew up with culturally conservative parents who had a really like strict understanding of women, what women did and how they lived and they cooked and cleaned, etc. And so, from that

understanding, I also exist in society and I know what the expectations are of women there as well. And these things correlate. And so to be the character of Ziwe that is brash and rude and thoughtful is in direct opposition to what a woman should be publicly according to sexism.

BEAT/MUSIC

Ziwe is so right. And when looked at through the lens of Black women – and *all* the expectations that come with that – her point of view, it's pretty inspiring.

And I think we could use a little *more* inspiration – and an opportunity to *try on* what it feels like when we're allowed to just live our truths. To be direct without being called angry. To exist on our own terms. To just... be. To just be human. And I know just the person to help with that...

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INTRO

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<< INTRO THEME BEGINS >>

MEGHAN: I'm Meghan. And this is ARCHETYPES – my podcast about the labels and tropes that try to hold women back.

And for today's episode, I had the pleasure of speaking to a woman who's done incredible work, exploring the many dimensions of Black women's lives...

Issa: I'm an L.A. native. I am a writer. And I just love to tell our stories. I love to tell Black women stories. And I just love to have fun, I'm having a good ass time.

And we're going to do more of that, after the break with Issa Rae...

See you in a minute.

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ACT 1

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Meghan: Do you want coffee? Do you want anything other than what you have?

Issa Rae: I'm okay with water. I don't want to over-caffeinate myself, I'm going to get it afterwards, because I'm gonna be like, yeah! (laughter)

Meghan: It's so funny. I only recently started drinking coffee again.

Issa Rae: What? Were you on tea?

Meghan: No.

Issa Rae: Oh you just didn't drink anything?

Meghan: Mhmmhm, I didn't even think about it.

Issa Rae: You're... no!

Meghan: When I was on set of course!

Issa Rae: yes!

Meghan: Like Nespresso all day, every day. And then I didn't really drink it in the UK and then...

Issa Rae: So what made you go back?

Meghan: Great question! (laughter) It's a great question. I guess because life started to come back and so people started to come. When guests come or meetings or when they're like, Oh, would you like coffee? And I was like, Maybe I should join them.

Issa Rae: I like the taste, too. It's like just part of my routine.

Meghan: Yeah, it's a ritual.

Issa Rae: Yeah, exactly!

Meghan: I'm so happy you're here.

Issa Rae: I'm so happy to be here! Thank you for having me.

Meghan: Of course!

Issa Rae: This is like, a long time in the works, so I'm really happy to be sitting on this couch.

Meghan: But also View Park!

Issa: Don't tell me you're from View Park?

Meghan:: My family goes waaay back in View Park!

Issa Rae: Are you kidding?! That's like where I shot my first web series.

Meghan: That web series was none other than *Awkward Black Girl* – This was Issa Rae’s first foray into redefining portrayals of Black women on the small screen. And it premiered on YouTube in 2011, this was just four years after Issa graduated from Stanford – and this show, it was widely celebrated...

CLIP FROM AWKWARD BLACK GIRL

White Boss: *I’m sorry girlfriend but you need a session of anger management.*

Jay: *But someone stole my stapler. Why not give them a session of don’t steal my s*** management?*

The web series’ success earned Issa the attention of networks like HBO, which is where she launched her incredibly highly acclaimed series – *Insecure* – in 2016.

The show follows a young woman – also named Issa – as she tries to make a life for herself in her late 20s and early 30s, and she tries to figure out who she is and where exactly she fits in.

INSECURE CLIP

Issa: *Go Shawty! It’s my birthday! But nobody cares because I’m not having a party! Cuz I’m feeling sorry..... for myself...*

And the show is, in my humble opinion, it’s a masterpiece. Not just because it offers the world a more nuanced understanding of Black women – free from tired old stereotypes – but also because it does so while crafting these beautiful intricate narratives about the search for a partner, for a fulfilling career, for deeper self-awareness – and, the ups and downs of relationships and a friendship...

INSECURE CLIP

Issa: *So I have a full evening planned. First, our group massage at 5pm. And next, we have dinner reservations at Nueva at 8pm. But right now, we pregame for maximum relaxation.*

The show takes place in L.A., and one of the things that I truly adore about it, is how it portrays the vibrancy, beauty, and diversity of my hometown, the city that I grew up in.

It’s also the city where Issa Rae was born, and where she now lives. In between, her family moved around quite a bit – to Senegal and then Maryland, before landing back in Los Angeles just before high school. And it was in that *in-between* time, between changing schools and constantly reinventing herself as a kid, that’s when Issa found solace in the arts, and a passion for telling stories about Black life.

So we started our conversation, of course, as you heard, connecting over LA, and the neighborhood of View Park – and the foundation it set for the ways that we both move through

the world. How we see the world, and the diversity we've been surrounded by for most of our upbringing.

Issa Rae: That neighborhood is predominantly Black, African-American. And so many of the houses have a history, like of just being passed down from generation to generation. I live next to the oldest living woman in View Park. Like who's lived there forever.

Meghan: How old is she?

Issa Rae: I want to say she's in her 90's.

Meghan: Oh, bless.

Issa: And it's just incredible. And her family still lives with her. They take care of her, they visit her. And that's like the kind of history that neighborhood has.

Meghan: Oh, it's great. I just remember anytime we go to that part of town where my mom now lives, Its like go "pink boxes, let's get a bean pie!"

Issa Rae: Oh, that is right! They used to always sell them on Slauson!

Meghan: Yes!

Issa Rae: And bean pies are ridiculously good! I haven't had one in so long! Wow.

Meghan: They are so good!

Issa Rae: Oh wow, now I'm going to have to find one! (laughter)

Meghan: Find a bean pie!

BEAT/MUSIC

Meghan: Where'd you go to high school?

Issa Rae: I went to King Drew Medical Magnet High School in Watts, Compton. I loved my high school experience. Like, I wanted to be a doctor, and going there made me realize that I did not want to be one.

Meghan: Why?

Issa Rae: Because we got to work in the hospital across the street. Killer King. And it had its name for a reason. Like the trauma unit was the best in the world because, you know, they had so many patients, but I was only in labor and delivery. You know, my dad was a pediatrician and so I was like, oh I wanna, I think that's awesome! I want to deliver babies, too. And that process was cool, but nobody ever tells you about afterbirth. And I was like. (laughter) What is this? I've never seen this in the movies! I don't want to do

this. And then I was in emergency and, you know, somebody came in with a knife stuck in their foot or like I just didn't like seeing people in pain. And so I was like, this is not for me.

Issa Rae: The other great thing about going to King Drew was like it was a predominantly Black and Latino high school and we had an amazing drama teacher who would find plays that were predominantly Black and Latino. He had introduced us to a canon of playwrights that I wouldn't have been familiar with, that I wasn't familiar with, and I don't think I would have been otherwise. And so I was spoiled in that way because it was catered to us, whereas going to Stanford, the drama department, you know, didn't have to. And there was, you know, had years of legacy — plays, theater — and I wasn't really big on musicals.

Meghan: Too much jazz hands. (laughter) A little too cheesy.

Issa: All of that! Smiling and jazz hands. And I can't dance or sing. I just don't have the makings of a musical theater actress. So it was very clear that it wasn't for me until a girl put on a play. It was a hip hopera, which was kind of a musical. But I was like, look, I'll take what I can get. And it was, you know, it was diverse. She was a Black girl, putting it on independently and cast me as one of four leads. And I was like, this is dope. She just did it outside the system and like, it's her work and she's putting it on and she's built it from the ground up and we're all participating. And you know that that really had an impact on me.

Meghan: Yeah. Is that one of the moments where it clicked like, oh, I can just make my own thing?

Issa Rae: 100%. Yes! And it was like, I can make my own thing and there's an audience for it and people will support it. There's, you know, it doesn't have to be perfect.

Meghan: Interesting, we can go back to this other catalyst moment for you with Moesha.

Issa Rae: Oh, yes! The best.

THEME FROM MOESHA

Do you remember Moesha? This was one of the true staples of Black sitcoms in the 90s. Moesha, played by the musician Brandy, was a teenage Black girl growing up in Los Angeles. And this was such a defining moment in television.

And lucky for Issa, she won a contest that got her a spot to a live taping of the show, plus her very own copy of a real life script.

Meghan: You went to a live taping...

Issa Rae: I went to a live taping, my first live taping, moving back to L.A. and first of all, moving back to L.A. from Maryland and having an interest in writing and being a TV fanatic was already like, oh my god, I'm going to the place where they make TV. I'm going to L.A., I'm going to Hollywood. So it feels tangible to me. And then to be invited to a live taping to see where one of my favorite shows was made, how it was made to see my favorite actress and musical superstar in front of me was incredible. But then, I won a script of that particular episode. But yeah, getting that teleplay was a game changer. Just because I had been trying to write, you know, TV shows and I had been writing my own little format, but to see how it was done. To have that template in front of me was. Like, it was incredible.

Meghan: You had a North Star.

Issa Rae: I had a North Star and I had the blueprint. And I felt like I could just, I could do it. What was stopping me when I could see how I had in my hand how an episode of TV was written, and made.

Meghan: What's so interesting, though, is like you look at the characters that you've created and the service that it's done for the community to be able to see nuanced, layered, multifaceted women. I mean, I remember when I was auditioning, the idea of even Black roles, I remember those casting sheets where the description of the character, she always had to have an edge or an attitude. And so talk to me about as you were putting your shows together, why it was important to you to play against those labels and to create something different.

Issa Rae: When I was in college, I was a cinephile. I, you know, loved television and reality TV had started to take over and there was a very specific type of Black woman that was featured in these shows. And so I'm talking about like...

Meghan: Oh Omarosa!

Issa Rae: Omarosa!

CLIP FROM REALITY TV (OMAROSA)

Omarosa: Now did you have a nose job?

Wendy Williams: No.

Omarosa: It looks like you've had a nose job.

Wendy: No

Omarosa: I just looked at before and after. Honey, before and after. Before and after pictures.

Wendy: But, but if I can suggest because the only thing I have done to my face is a little botox. I would suggest for you some restylane. The lines stay. They say good black don't crack. She's crackin'.

Omarosa: And I would suggest a wig that doesn't stuff my head three inches. That would be my suggestion.

Issa Rae: Flavor of love was big when I was in college...

Meghan: Oh, my gosh, of course!

CLIP FROM FLAVOR OF LOVE

***New York:** She's trashy, she's slutty. There's something really really gutterbutt about Nibbles.*

CLIP FROM FLAVOR OF LOVE

***New York:** Oh my God! Are you insane? Beyonce? Beyonce? Beyonce? You know who you look like? You look like Luther Vandross!*

Issa Rae: It was this ruthless Black woman or this uncouth Black woman that, like it was like it was made to – we were made to laugh at them as opposed to or to laugh with them in some ways. But it was just like these caricatures of Black women.

Meghan: You're so right.

Issa Rae: And I remember being so tired of that but not being conscious of the effect it was having. So I had a friend who wasn't from this country, who lived in my dorm at the time. And loved this dude, we would just be kicking it in my room and sometimes he would just be like "ooh I can see you want to have an attitude about that, do it! Roll your neck!"

Meghan: Mmhmmm.

Issa: And in his mind he was just trying to relate to me, but like, he was using these images that we'd see on the television shows and like...

Meghan: It was informing his perception.

Issa Rae: Of me and the other Black girls on campus. And so you know, we'd have to educate him and he was open minded, but I was like, this is a problem. And this is the only image, and there's no nuance to it, you know? And so for me, it was just about trying to create other images and try to balance what was represented on television. And so, I started writing characters that were more like my friends and family members and that was my effort to kind of combat that.

BEAT

Meghan: Did you ever think that what you were writing was going to be so much a part of the zeitgeist and changing cultural conversation?

Issa Rae: Absolutely not. No, I think even with *Insecure* like that first season, it was just about us being able to make the show that we wanted. And in writing the pilot for it, I was just tapping into my real life and again, in just an effort to showcase something else that was not on television or that hadn't been on television in a very long time. Just a regular, insecure Black girl. And even in creating the title, initially there was pushback when I decided I wanted to call the show *Insecure*. I remember we had a table read and the then president, um, was just like, you know, the table read went really well. And he was like I just had a question about this, this title, *Insecure*. And, you know, at that point, this is the pilot, so the series has not been picked up, I'm in people pleasing mode...

Meghan: And you are insecure!

Issa Rae: Yes, I am! There is no stability whatsoever. And so he's just like, you know, this title *Insecure*. When I see these women, I don't see that. I see that they're fierce, they're flawless. They are confident and I was like, that is part of the issue. Like, I want to be able to show that not all women are like this. I don't feel fierce, flawless all the time. These characters aren't that all the time, and that's okay. Like, I want to show that they can be vulnerable. And I think even that by the time *Insecure* was like that was the narrative about Black women and that felt impenetrable. Like, you know, it was like we overcorrected this other narrative and now we couldn't be human. We were superhuman.

Meghan: Right.

Issa Rae: And so for me, it was just really important to show that, but I didn't know that it would have such an impact. I'm proud of the impact that it has.

Meghan: I mean, one of the things that I thought was really interesting and I can't remember what interview you said it in, but even talking about just creating a show like *Larry David* it's not color specific, it's not race specific. It's just people.

Issa Rae: It's just people. One of the things that Prentice, who was our showrunner, expressed, was just like, I want to be able to have scenes where Black people are just washing their hands. White shows just get entire scenes dedicated to people just walking upstairs pensively. And then we don't really get that. There always has to be a message. And so for us it was just about like living day to day.

Meghan: Just being.

Issa: Just being. And even if we did have. You know, these moments that were considered microaggressions or racist...that we didn't dedicate time to, like, oh, this is a

racist moment because in real life you don't get those opportunities. It's more about like, I experienced this microaggression at work. Now, how is that going to affect the way that I talk to my partner when I get home? How is that going to affect my mindset when I'm having this conversation with my friend? How does it dictate the way I move the next day as opposed to *racism*? *Oh, no!* You know, because that's just how we live.

Meghan: Yeah. Like it doesn't have to be, like, an after school special.

Issa Rae: Exactly that. Yes.

Meghan: [*makes xylophone noise*] The more you know! Remember that? Like the shooting star across the screen?

Issa Rae: Yes, of course! Yep.

BEAT/MUSIC

After the break we talk with Issa about claiming her authority as a Black woman in entertainment, and ask her the age old question...

Meghan: Do you feel that you're allowed to be angry in certain moments?

Issa Rae: Absolutely not.

More from Issa right after the break. Stay with me.

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ACT 2

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MEGHAN: Welcome back. So we've been getting into the archetype of the angry black woman and one of the things I wanted to do, before we keep digging into it with Issa Rae, was to help us better understand just how this image, how this idea of the angry black woman came to be. So, we called up an expert. This time Dr. Emily Bernard, whose work in American Studies centers on the Black experience in the United States.

Emily Bernard: When I think about the kinds of stereotypes that black women are up against today, my mind immediately goes to the image of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson during her confirmation hearings and how she sat with so much poise and grace and openness as a gallery of senators tried to discredit her, who tried to undermine her...

Sen. Marsha Blackburn: *Do you consider critical race theory in your sentencing decisions as a judge?*

Sen. Ted Cruz: *Do you agree with Ms. Hannah-Jones that one of the primary reasons the colonists decided to declare independence is because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery?*

Sen. Grassly: *Do the first amendment free speech protections apply equally to conservative and liberal protestors?*

Emily Bernard: Some of the things they said to her would have infuriated me. And I know, I know they probably, you know, maybe they infuriated her. // And I was angry for her that she couldn't be angry.

Sen. Marsha Blackburn: *Can you provide a definition for the word woman.*

Judge Jackson: *Can I provide a definition? No. I can't*

Sen. Marsha Blackburn: *You can't?*

Judge Jackson: *Not in this context. I'm not a biologist.*

Sen. Marsha Blackburn: *You mean the meaning of the word woman is so unclear and controversial that you can't give me a definition?*

I remember watching these hearings in the spring of 2022. They were gripping and painful. And in front of those senators on the Judiciary Committee, then-Judge Jackson, she remained poised and composed – no matter what was happening for her underneath the surface. Which I can only begin to imagine.

Judge Jackson: *I have been a judge for nearly a decade now. I evaluate the facts and I interpret and apply the law to the facts of the case before me without fear or favor, consistent with my judicial oath.*

Emily Bernard: They tried to rattle her. And get her to react in a way where they could characterize her according to their stereotypes of black women. Angry, irrational, emotional, impulsive, all human emotions that black women are often not granted the privilege of expressing.

And according to Dr. Bernard, these sorts of stereotypes, at least through an American lens, they go way back...

Emily Bernard: I mean, I think that we go back to these stereotypes or these archetypes as they first evolved, // of course, we have to go back to the institution of slavery, which was, for it to succeed, you had to keep black people under control not only doing that

physically on the plantation, but you're controlling them through myths and through stereotypes // that get shared across plantations.

So we're either depicted in these extremes // either we are being cast as extremely passive, as in the kind of old plantation stereotypes of the docile black people; who are there only to serve white people //-having the absence of human qualities, integrity and a desire for self-determination // or we are depicted as having an overabundance, if you will, of other human qualities like passion, excitement, rage. These are also human qualities as well. But when we are captured in a moment of expressing those emotions, they are almost always meant to discredit us as human beings, as human emotions, because we have too much of them. We either have too much or too little. And we're rarely able to express anything in either extreme.

[BEAT]

Meghan: Did you watch any of the the hearings with Ketanji?

Issa Rae: I could not.

Meghan: Tell me why.

Issa Rae: Because I just knew they were going to come for her. And I already saw how much restraint she had. // And they were going to find attacks, they were going to dig. And I didn't want to see that unfold. But I heard she did a wonderful job-and she's, you know, she's here. She made it.

Meghan: There is the pressure, I think, to not just do that for herself, but to do that for all of us.

Issa Rae: For all of us, yes!

Meghan: Which is the same way you're saying you carry yourself. And you make a choice, right? You make a choice to be as grounded as possible in what we share because of all the things that are going to be said no matter what.

This part of my conversation with Issa Rae reminded me of a clip that I saw of her on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, from 2018. What she says here, it pushes back against these other instincts. And so, I played it for her.

In it she's talking to Stephen about how she turns to a group of Black women in the entertainment industry for advice...

COLBERT CLIP "Don't Be Afraid to be a Bitch"

Issa: People I admire like Shonda Rhimes, Ava Duvernay, Mara Brock Akil, Debbie Allen... they've all, cause I'm very, I tend to be afraid of, like, upsetting

people, and that will get you nowhere here. Especially when you're trying to create a show... as a showrunner, being in the industry, just as a woman, once you're labeled difficult, your career is kind of over, because then it's like everybody's saying like she's hard to work with, beware, and then you don't get many chances to fail.

Colbert: So what's the advice?

Issa: *The advice from them was don't be afraid to be a bitch.*

Meghan: So talk to me about that moment or what that feeling was for you. And if that still rings true to you.

Issa Rae: It still rings true to me. I never seek out, like, being a bitch. That's just not.

Meghan: That's not aspirational. (laughter)

Issa Rae: It's not for me! But I take the fear of being labeled as that when I want to convey my point of view, when I want to express my disappointment in something, when I want things to be better. Like I take away the fear of being labeled as such because I shouldn't have to, to fear that if I just want something to be great. But the fear came from literally witnessing early on in trying to, whether seek women writers to work with, women directors hearing like the feedback from men, in some cases some women, about why I should not work with them was it often came down to them being difficult and that word in particular was used often. And when I'd be like, okay, well, difficult how it might be... *You know, like they just they were just really hard to work with in the or their tone was a little bit off or there was just a lot of pushback or they'd be too ambitious in some way* and it's like I thought ambition was a good thing. But I would listen!

I would take their word for it. And that person may not get a job because of what one man or woman said about them. And I always thought, like, damn, what if somebody said that about me? Like would they just immediately take their word for it. And what context would that be used in? Because, you know, I found out recently.

Issa Rae: And my colleague didn't mean it as an insult. At least I don't think he did. But I was talking about just this even this last show I did and how I discovered about myself that I might be a control freak. That was new. I was like, Oh, yeah, I think I might be a control freak because there are just certain things that I'm not willing to let go. And he was like, Yeah, you're very particular. And I was like. Really? But I took it as a compliment.

Meghan: You're allowed to be particular!

Issa Rae: And some of my favorite creatives, I've noticed that they're very particular. And I felt like I lacked that in a way. And so to me, I was like. Thank you! And he meant it in a way like, Yeah, you have control freak tendencies because you're particular. But I was like, that just means I have a point of view. That means that, you know, I have a particular taste and I appreciate that. Thank you. And so for me, it just means that I have a sense of what I want. And so I have no issue claiming those things.

Meghan: But I think what, you know, even in *Awkward Black Girl*, I think so many of those characters, this is about that, right? Like, women in how you show up in the workplace, how you're conceived, misconceived or portrayed. Because even though in that moment that you're describing where this colleague says, yeah, you're particular, you can receive it that way. But if he describes you that way to someone else, they're like, *oh what does that mean?*

Issa Rae: Yeah, like particular *how?*

Meghan: Yeah. Because I often find myself even in walking into a room, I'm particular. A) I think a high tide raises all ships, right? We're all going to succeed. So let's make sure it's really great because it's a shared success for everybody. But I also know that I will find myself cowering and tiptoeing into a room where, I don't know if you do the thing that I find the most embarrassing, when you're saying a sentence, but the intonation goes up like it's a question.

Issa Rae: Oh, man.

Meghan: And I was just like, Oh, my God, stop, stop, whispering and tiptoeing around it. Just say what it is that you need. You're allowed to set a boundary. You're allowed to be clear. It does not make you demanding. It does not make you difficult. Makes you clear.

Issa Rae: Yeah. My form of that is like question qualifiers, or maybe we can do something else. You know, it's always offering a backup, and I have to stop doing that. And just being like, no this is what I want, because it's just another way of, like, cowering from your power. And I just am not interested.

Meghan: Well, but was there a point in your life, and maybe it still happens to you now,, because of the archetypes, especially as a black woman, do you feel that you're allowed to be angry in certain moments?

Issa Rae: Absolutely not. Because, I can't lose my cool, I can't do that especially as a black woman, but also just even as a public figure now. Because people are looking for ways to justify their perception of you. That doesn't mean I don't get angry. That might mean that I will vent my frustrations to someone that I trust, get it out of my system and then go in fix mode. And I think even personality wise, I'm always like, I don't want to sit in my anger too long anyway because what does that do? I want to work on fixing

something, but I want to be allowed to have that emotion because it's a natural...like, it's an emotion.

Meghan: Of course! And it shouldn't be internalized.

Issa Rae: Absolutely not. So that's something I'm still wrestling with.

Meghan: Do you find that, you know I was thinking about your origin story of moving around so much and trying to find a sense of belonging. And then this time that you're spending in the hospital and realizing, you don't want to see people in pain. It's so interesting just for me, hearing it from the outside, going, all of those things inform the work that you've created. Because your characters are finding a sense of belonging.

Issa: Yes

Meghan: It's infused with this levity and joy and laughter because you don't want to see people in that much pain.

Issa Rae: (laughter) Wow. I've never heard that described in that way.

Meghan.: But that's just me trying to connect the dots.

Issa Rae: That's so true.

Meghan: The things that made sense to you or didn't when you were younger. I don't know in that granular level that is so much the connective tissue it feels like in your work.

Issa Rae: It's so true. Here I am talking about like, Oh yeah, I just want to explore my P.O.V. and why I write certain things. And that is it! And it does have that foundation. I don't think I've ever connected those dots in that way. I feel like I'm confident in my purpose and I'm confident in what I'm meant to do and love what I do. But it took a while to get there. And I'm so in this now place that I forget I was trying to figure that out.

Meghan: Well, I mean, self-described as awkward. So it takes a long time to go from awkward to this kind of confidence. What made you feel so awkward?

Issa: Man, so much. Again I think that, that sense of having to reinvent myself and it left me in a place of not necessarily knowing who I was at my core and shape shifting, being things to other people. I was just kind of hiding from myself. And so when I did embrace who I was because I kind of had to when I was outside of this school setting and I was like in the real world I just found myself not knowing how to operate because I'm not in a consistent environment and so for me I don't know that I have these social skills and I'm overthinking things and I'm always in this lens of wondering what people think about me

after an interaction. And it's just this the awkward version of Du Bois's double consciousness.

MUSIC IN

MEGHAN: If you're not as familiar, here Issa's referring to WEB Du Bois. He was an African American intellectual, activist, and author – and his concept of “double consciousness,” this is an idea that he coined that dates back to 1903. And it basically explains this “twoness” that Black people in America face and have faced – he described it as a Black self, and an American self – and the effort, again, coined from 1903 - the effort at that point to now – to reconcile the two identities inwardly... The ways in which African Americans are compelled to *see* themselves and *measure* themselves through the lens of a dominant and majority white society.

Issa: It's like you're always replaying these moments in your head and you're always you have this veil where you're like wondering how people are viewing you. And, there's an insecurity that comes with that.

Meghan: Yeah...

Issa: But I also thought it was, like, kind of funny too (laughter) because It's not that serious. Because you would overthink the most minute situations and I found the humor in that.

Meghan: Do you still overthink like that?

Issa: For sure. I was just laughing the other day. About like, just even when it comes down to comebacks, like if someone says something to you that might be rude or out of pocket, you don't have it in the moment. And then like I will spend days thinking about ooh I should have hit him back with this or hit back like that, why didn't I do this? And now they probably think they won. And it's just like...

Meghan: Fixating

Issa: Fixating to the point where psychotically so, I might like in my mind fix it. Like I said that, no, I said it and it's fine. When they're not even worried about it. But, that's just — the overthinking happens a lot. But I just know that that's a part of my personality now. And it doesn't drive me as crazy.

CLIP OF ISSA TALKING TO SELF IN MIRROR

Mirror Issa: *Maybe there's a little voice in the back of your head that's saying things aren't done yet*

Issa: *That's you. You're the little voice in the back of my head.*

Mirror Issa: *Teedle-ee-hee-hee*

Issa: (mimics teedle-ee-hee-hee and walks away)
Mirror Issa: Are you? You're leaving? Oh, c'mon.

BEAT/MUSIC

Meghan: So one of the things I've been doing at the end of each episode is asking everyone to describe yourself as a little girl in three words.

Issa: To describe myself as a little girl....

Meghan: What three words would you use to describe the younger version of yourself?

Issa Rae: Uh. Fearless...Goofy. Ambitious.

Meghan: Good. And you, three words, now.

Issa: HA! Confident. Loyal. Free.

Meghan: Amazing. I mean, I'm just. I know, I don't know you. I just met you, but I just, especially because, local L.A. girl, I just feel so proud of what you've accomplished.

Issa: Thank you.

Meghan: Genuinely, you've done just such powerful, powerful work. And it's a good reminder to people that powerful, influential work doesn't have to be so serious.

You can do it in a way that with a soft touch might even be more impactful. So thank you.

Issa: Thank you so much, Meghan. And thank you for having me on!

Meghan: Yeah, it's my pleasure!

Issa: Shout out to LA!

Meghan: Hey!

We didn't graduate in the same year, but I'll show you this. I'm doing something with my hands.

Issa Rae: She's throwing up gang signs everyone!

Meghan: It's 99. Do you see? Do you see the apostrophe?

Issa Rae: 99! We used to do oh three!

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CLOSING THOUGHTS

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MEGHAN: At the end of each episode, I like to reflect..on who I've spoken to, what they've shared, and how it's made me feel. And, you know, as I started to put pen to paper after these conversations, I just kept stopping. And that's because I couldn't find the right words, or enough words, or the strongest words. But I kept coming back to the same thoughts. And it was a poem by...the greatest really, Dr. Maya Angelou. And so I thought today about the unfair trope of what the angry black woman looks like, against what the strong black woman feels like. And that no one better than Dr. Angelou could put it to words. And she did. So here it is, read aloud by the author herself – it's called *Still I Rise*.

Maya Angelou: *You may write me down in history*

With your bitter, twisted lies,

You may trod me in the very dirt

But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?

Why are you beset with gloom?

Just 'cause I walk like I've got oil wells

Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,

With the certainty of tides,

Just like hopes springing high,

Still I rise.

Did you want to see me broken?

Bowed head, lowered eyes?

Shoulders falling down like teardrops,

Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my sassiness upset you?

Don't take it so hard

Just 'cause I laugh like I've got gold mines

Digging in my own backyard.

You can shoot me with your words,

You can cut me with your lies,

You can kill me with your hatefulness,

But just like life, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness offend you?

Does it come as a surprise

That I dance as if I have got diamonds

At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame

I rise

Up from a past rooted in pain

I rise

A black ocean, leaping and wide,

Welling and swelling, bearing in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak improbably clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the hope and the dream of the slave.

And so... [claps]

MEGHAN: And Still I Rise. Those powerful, powerful words...it's incredible. I had a great time with you today - I hope you did, too. And I can't wait to be with you again next week - we have a lot more in store.

Have a good one and until then, as ever, I'm Meghan.

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CREDITS
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Archetypes is a Spotify Original.

The podcast is a co-production between Archewell Audio, Gimlet and Spotify.

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"Still I Rise" By Dr. Maya Angelou
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