



PREVENT. RESIST. SUPPORT.

Episode 2: Acts of Resistance

with Shaiden Keaney



University
of Windsor

Office of Sexual Violence Prevention,
Resistance, and Support

Prevent Resist Support Podcast

Season 2 Episode 2: Acts of Resistance with Shaiden Keaney

Anne Rudzinski: Hi, everyone, I'm Anne and you're listening to Prevent Resist Support. Today we're chatting with Shaiden Keaney from Acts of Resistance, which is a 2SLGBTQIA plus self defense course that's related to Wendo women's self defense. Our campus has had a relationship with Wendo for a while now, we've been bringing courses to campus for a few years. And we're really excited to be partnering now with Acts of Resistance. So stay tuned if you'd like to hear about this awesome new course that we're bringing to the University of Windsor. And as always, I will make sure that our links and resources that are discussed in the episode are in our episode description. And you can also find an accessible transcript of this episode on our website. It'll be posted shortly. Whenever we're discussing topics of sexual violence, we always like to make sure we're giving out lots of resources for support. So if you're at the University of Windsor, you can reach out to us at the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Resistance and Support at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. And if you're not in our area, you can find support through the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres at their website sexualassaultsupport.ca. Let's get into our interview with Shaiden.

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: Great, well, we have Shaiden here with us today from Acts of Resistance. Welcome Shaiden.

Shaiden Keaney: Hi. Anne! Hi everyone is I'm really excited to be here.

Anne: So excited to have you one of the reasons that we have Shaiden on the podcast right now is because we are bringing the Acts of Resistance program to UWindsor virtually this month in August and again in the fall semester. And so we're really excited to have this program and the chance to chat about it. So let's start out by just talking about what is the Acts of Resistance program.

Shaiden: Acts of Resistance is a self defense program. So this is not what you would consider a martial art per se. It really is about being grounded in self defense and self protection. It grows out of a lineage of self defense and originated within Wendo. So as you may, many of your listeners might know about Wendo's women's self defense, and Acts of Resistance is a gender inclusive, self defense program that is designed specifically for folks who identify as two spirit and or LGBTQIA plus. So it's a queer and trans and two spirit self defense program.

Anne: That is so awesome. And we're so excited to have that as part of our, you know, initiatives through the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Resistance and Support and partnered with our UWindsor Pride Campaign.

Shaiden: Woo.

Anne: So really exciting to bring that to our campus this year. Um, how did you get into teaching the program? Because I think you know, our students always like to know how people got into the jobs that they have, because sometimes people are doing really cool work. So like, what was your journey to get to this point?

Shaiden: It starts a quite a while ago, I think it starts at about 10 years ago. I was on campus in at a university at Laurentian University up in Sudbury, and I saw a flyer for Wendo and it had this little stick figure with this person with like, with the like, pumped fist in the air and fire shooting

out of it and said sparks some ask kick some ass and take a class. I thought wow, that is really where where I'm at like this sounds cool. I registered right away. And in fact, I registered so early that the office lost my registration. And I showed up the morning of and they were able to get me in thankfully and that's when I met Deb Chard. Now in that class, I was still reeling after after having lost a friend of mine to gendered violence. And in that class, I remember saying to Deb you know what if like, what if something happened to someone I care about and I think that it actually could have been prevented. And she looked at me with this intensity in her eyes. And she said, every single one of us has done something that we wish we could go back and change. That doesn't change the fact that nothing that has ever happened to us or anyone we love or care about. It wasn't their fault. And what was most powerful about that moment is that I didn't actually realize that I was carrying some remnants of the what ifs. And it really freed me to be able to place the responsibility squarely where it belonged, which is on the perpetrator. Now, I took a really deep exhale, and I looked around the room and there were other people other there were at the time identified as a woman. And there were other women in that room who looked at me knowingly, who looked at me with recognition, and I wasn't the only person who experienced a really profound transformation in that class. So that was the day that I began my somewhat long journey to become a Wendo instructor. And I was a Wendo instructor for for I think it was in a range of four or five years before I started to realize that actually, women's only space doesn't really fit for me anymore. And so, I am a non binary instructor and I am a non binary Wendo women's self defense instructor, thankfully, the organization is still cool with me being part of what they do. And at the same time, there is a particular need to centre the experiences of folks were two spirit LGBTQIA plus, who are across the gender spectrum, because there are particular self defense needs, and there are particular ways in which conversations can be framed that can be of most benefit to, to our community, to that community. And so that's where Acts of Resistance essentially, that's where I that's where I landed with Acts of Resistance. Now, it pre existed me as well, there was another Wendo instructor who essentially created it out of out of the need that she saw as well, for folks who are across the two spirit and queer and trans

community to access self defense that is inclusive, in that community in that scene.

Anne: That is amazing. I think that you know, Wendo is magic. And I also think that Deb is magic, like

Shaiden: Mhm

Anne: She always knows, like, exactly what the core of the thing you're talking about is and is able to pull out those threads and give you you know, the thing back I think, always I need I don't know, every time I talk to Deb, I walk away from the conversation with like, so many things to think about. She's absolutely just amazing. And we love Deb at UWindsor

Shaiden: Indeed.

Anne: Ah, yeah, she comes and does the Wendo class for us. So if you're listening and are interested in, you know, Wendo, also, we do have that on our campus as well with Deb, which is so excellent. Yeah, and I just love that it's such a, it's such a journey, because I think that a lot of young folks think that you kind of decide the thing that you would like to do, and you just kind of go for it and you get there. But I think for many of us that's a bit more windy. And we like kind of ended up doing some very cool things that are not always exactly what we imagined.

Shaiden: Too true.

Anne: Yeah. So what are the differences between Acts of Resistance and the Wendoprogram? And what does self defense look like for us LGBTQIA plus folks?

Shaiden: So I'm going to start maybe actually with what's similar. So as I said, Acts of Resistance evolved out of Wendo. And for, for our listeners who haven't had the opportunity to participate in a Wendo course, it really is about half half conversation slash discussion and physical technique. So there's a way in which narrative comes full circle into becoming part of how it is that we embody our bodies. And that really is a big part of

what we're going to talk about, I think later in this conversation around what what do we mean when we say somatic self defense. So in terms of how does Acts of Resistance differ from Wendo women's self defense, it really is about who's in the room, and who's in the room defines what it what our conversations are made up of. So, whereas with Wendo women's self defense, it's focused on an intersectional feminist understanding of, of how it is that women experience violence and gendered violence, for Acts of Resistance, it's about an intersectional understanding of how it is that violence affects members of our community, not only in a gendered way, and but also in a way that takes into account how how transphobia might be affecting us how queer phobia might be affecting us. And again, it's not that Wendo doesn't address these. But when we place the focus on queer and trans, and two spirit experiences, it like it shifts the focus in a subtle but powerful way. So, you know, for someone who identifies as a lesbian, or who identifies as a trans woman, either space would be open and welcome to her. It would, in terms of Acts of Resistance, it's really, it the focus is just shifted in that way.

Anne: Yeah, I can see how maybe it might feel like very welcoming to know that the course is for other folks who are two spirit or queer or trans. But I love that you're also highlighting that Wendo is also open to trans women, and is very accepting. I had an awesome course that I took that had some very out trans women, and they were so welcomed in the course, and all of the women were just absolutely lovely to them. And so that was also a really great experience. And I think there's just so much power in having both of these as opportunities for folks. So my next question is, what is the future of self defense for those who identify as two spirit or LGBTQIA plus,

Shaiden: Oh, I have some ideas. More and more, I see ways and so I grew up, I'm someone who's white bodied. And I grew up in northern Ontario. And my experience of growing up is, is very individualistic. So it's about, you know, what grades you can get in school. How well you can perform on tests or in sports. And I think, you know, we, I've experienced this throughout this pandemic, and I and I hope, I wonder if you've maybe experienced some of this too. I see and experience and feel ways in which people are challenging that idea that we are actually that we are

individual, that we are separated from one another. I think that's being undone. I think that there's a global nervous system that is being built where there's a particular kind of attenuation to one another struggles that people are experiencing, and, and paying heed to. And with that, I believe that the future of self defense will include more and more as it evolves. Community self defense, so and I believe that we can really hold so much reverence human, or I can hold so much humility, reverence and gratitude towards black and indigenous women in particular, but also BIPOC femme folks in general, for holding the the abolitionist vision, that we actually can support one another to the extent that we undo structures of violence that that we're not just talking about, yes, restorative justice in our communities is absolutely necessary and possible. And also, we are talking about transformative justice so that the fundamental situation is circumstances, structures, contexts that lead to violence in the first place. That those structures are being challenged and being shaken at the roots, again, this is me speaking as a white bodied person who is relaying a vision that I have had the immense privilege to learn from black and indigenous women and femme folks who are, who have, you know, purport disproportionately being the vision holders for this future. Also, when we think about each other as a, as a nervous system and as an ecosystem, another vision that I hold is that all of us are necessary. So the skills that each and every one of us carry the visions, the truths that each and every one of us carry, those can be put in service of that more connected future. And so when I think about self defense skills in particular, I think about how powerful those skills can make us feel in our bodies, how resourced those skills can make us feel in our bodies, and how fun it really can be, to be in a space, where others are also embodying their power, and their joy.

Anne: Ah okay, all of that. Amazing. I also feel like it's really all about community. And when you were talking about that, I was thinking about how, like, you know, like you said, Wendo was also like a transformative experience. For me, it was very impactful. I absolutely loved the class. But I, when I thought about it in the lens of the things you were just saying, I realized that what was the most impactful for me was not like the self defense techniques, but actually being in a space full of women who are all there to have this, like shared experience. And

it was the sense of that community. I think that was so impactful for me.

Shaiden: Mhm.

Anne: Um, yeah, and I think with the pandemic, we're all kind of feeling like, there is a much bigger need for community than we maybe realized when we were all so like, nested in our very individualistic lives.

Shaiden: Mhm.

Anne: Prior to this, like, real global shake up. And so yeah, I think that, that is absolutely necessary. And I love you know, the things that you said too, about folks recognizing their own roles, like we all have different skills, and we all have different abilities, and those are all things that, you know, are necessary and are needed. And I talk about this sometimes when I talk about like, activism and social movements, but like, we need folks to like babysit, and take care of people's kids so that they can go protest as much as we need people to go protest. And like, we need first aid, we need food, we need freshwater, like we need all the things. And so I think we tend to centre, like certain types of activism as like the gold standard, when really, there are so many different roles and spaces and things that need to happen to make the social change happen that we want. So I love thinking about this in terms of community and also acknowledging all of the work that like folks of colour have been putting into this for so much longer than any of us are probably aware

Shaiden: So much longer than for sure, I think I'm aware of. At the same time drawing from what you're saying, I want to uphold or hold up, lift up NY SHN, the Native Youth Sexual Health Network that has done such a powerful job of connecting the dots between between sexual health and the health of the land from an indigenous perspective. And, and as you were saying, Anne, how important the water is, I want to also lift up the water protectors who are right now challenging line three. There there is when we're talking about the water, and we're talking about survival, and we're talking about which which neighborhoods in which communities are poisoned as a result of the waters being contaminated. You know, it's disproportionately black, indigenous and

or people of colour who are experiencing the brunt of the of environmental violence. And yet it's also indigenous people who are at the forefront of protecting the land. And that's not a big, when we're when we're also talking about who it is that is who who bears the brunt, the most the the greater the greatest brunt in terms of gender or transphobic violence. Again, it's like we need to rally around one another because the violence that's being inflicted on BIPOC communities is a violence that's inflicted on our communities in general, once we start to understand that we are a collective nervous system that is connected to the same land base. I don't think I'm saying as the succinctly or as brilliantly as NY SHN is able to. So again, like I want to lift them up. Yeah

Anne: I love that. And I wish I had a citation for this. But I had a I had gotten to this conference, like seven years ago, and there was this really wonderful keynote, where they talked about the linkages between colonialism and sexual violence. And one of the things they said that just like shook me, was like, we can't talk about consent unless we acknowledge that we are on land that we don't have consent to be on. And it was like, just an absolute moment in my life of like recognition that like these systems are so much bigger than we think they are, and that all of these problems are interconnected. And so I love that you're bringing that to this discussion. And I hope that that is, you know,

Shaiden: Yes to consent culture.

Anne: Yes, I love it. So I'm just a bit of a shift. I know that the last time we talked, we talked a little bit about somatic self defense, which I think sounds absolutely fascinating. So can you tell us a little bit about what that is, and what it means for the self defense that you teach?

Shaiden: Yeah, this is my favorite topic. So somatic or Soma is a Greek word that that refers to the organism and its entirety. So people think about holistic, so like holistic self defense, like it's, it's intellectual, it's emotional. It's embodied. And part of what makes it particularly somatic and sort of like big S Somatic is that somatic self defense recognizes how it is that we have been shaped in our survival strategies. So there are essentially four main survival strategies that we have. And

when I'll start sort of from the, the top of the brain down, the midbrain, is about fight and flight, it's about hitting hard, running fast, it's about when the adrenaline coursing through our bodies, how it is that we get ourselves to safety. There's also the freeze response, and that goes down into the lower brains at the basal part of the brain. And then there's also a fourth one that doesn't always get talked about, which is appease. So when we have fight, flight, freeze, and appease those are, those are four major umbrellas in terms of survival shaping. Now, that can shape so our survival shaping can shape the way that we move through the world, it can, it can literally shape our posture. When we talk about survival shaping, we're talking about the shortcuts that our brains and our body and our muscle tissue have made in order to ensure that we are safe. I am under the assumption that the majority of people who are two spirit, queer and or trans have some kind of survival shaping, because there's something that you have had to do in order to get yourself to today. Survival is about finding ways to either ignore or speak back to the street harasser or to the parent who maybe rejected us or refused to acknowledge the fullness of who we are, to the neighbor who taunted us, you know, and across the spectrum of things that may have occurred to us in our lives. There are ways that we have survived and got ourselves through to today. And every single thing that you my dear listeners have done in order to get to today is brilliant, and beautiful. One of the things that we focus on also in somatic self defense is not just acknowledging the survival shaping, but getting curious, like, how is it that the survival shaping has showed up in our lives but and also how we pattern our lives? And how it is that we may be able to offer ourselves more options than we thought were available to us? How do we increase our capacity? Now, in these classes, that gets done in a couple of ways, one, we do use narrative strategies. So we use very intentional survival strategies that have a, an arc, an arc of, of resolution, an arc of survival, an arc of validation. Because we need to model to each other, how it is that we've survived, and also validate the different strategies that some of us may have used in order to get through whatever we've got through. Another way in which we can increase our capacity is through engaging in our bodies in a new and perhaps different way. And what I mean by that is encouraging what's called interoception. interoception is the exploration of how it is that I am in my body, how do I know if I'm hot? How do I know if I'm cold?

How do I know if I'm comfortable or uncomfortable? And these are some of the the things that we might expect that we would explore in the context of a course. There's also something called proprioception. So proprioception is how it is that I relate to the space around me. Now, exploring how it is that I might press against a surface, or might orient myself towards the door and exploring how it is that that might land in my in my interoceptive sense, that can also help me to get curious and gain information about how it is that I navigate space, in response to my survival shaping.

Anne: I think this really kind of like, melds well, with a lot of the things we talked about in our office, which is you know about thinking about, like you said, how that like mid brain is sometimes like taking over for us to help us through situations that are difficult, and how, you know, we should thank ourselves for getting ourselves through whatever we did, whether that was through a fight response, or a flight response or a freeze response. And I think just kind of knowing how our brain functions around those things is really helpful. Because I think there's a lot of self blame that comes along with, you know, things that happen and the ways that people react to them, and the ways that we react to them, which I think actually ties really well into one of our questions that we were planning to talk about today. And I would love to know what your thoughts are on victim blaming. I know that when you teach self defense, that's often something that you spend a lot of time discussing. And so what are your thoughts on victim blaming? And also, are there any really specific types of victim blame that happened for 2SLGBTQIA folks that you'd like to highlight or touch on or deliver any messages about today?

Shaiden: The core message that I want to convey is that if anything has happened to you in your life, it was not your fault. The responsibility exists with the perpetrator. This is the message that got me into being a self defense instructor. And it will be the last breath that I breathe on my way out. It is ultimately ultimately, we need to honour one another's resilience and resourcefulness and when we can get the shame out of the room, then the healing has more room to move forward with. Now, a lot so much of the victim blaming that shows up I think in the two spirit LGBTQIA community or shows up for us is that is tied to

misogyny and is tied to, to racism. Not to mention class oppression, like it's all. It's all connected once we once we press on one part of the web. We are connecting with the entirety of the web. And this image of the web, it's like that the web of oppression if we if we touch on one part of the web of oppression, we are connecting with the the other intersecting elements of it were not separated from one another. Similarly, when we touch on one part of the web, of resilience and of community based grassroots justice, we have the potential and the option to touch on the web of resilience that crosses that that can provide waves of liberation for all of us. This is why we need each other within the movement for embodied liberation. Now, there are things that people say like if you didn't act so feminine, or if you didn't act so masculine, if you didn't wear this, if you didn't wear that, if you weren't so flamboyant, if you didn't put yourself out there, then you would not be such a target. And that's not fair. There's three dimensions that we there's this trifecta of social engagement, that I borrow from Stacey K. Haynes, that is that we all deserve, dignity, safety and belonging. And when I think about dignity, part of being dignified within who we are is expressing ourselves to the fullest. So if who you are is this flamboyant queen, then yes, be you please give give the rest of us the gift of of youth in this world, when we ask people to give up their dignity in order to have safety and belonging, that means that there's an erosion and a cutting off of aspects of ourselves that actually is not tenable in the long term. One of my, in another aspect of my life, I am a social worker, and I work primarily with trans and non binary youth who are exploring their gender identities and coming out to their parents and, and perhaps starting the process of social or physical transition. And when, when I see that they are being asked to give up their dignity, in exchange for belonging and safety, I can see the ways that that that shapes them. And that is not what any of us deserve we there is a way in which the human spirit as encased within the human body needs to breathe, and that can only breathe within that trifecta of dignity, safety, and belonging.

Anne: That is absolutely amazing. And I think you know, is, if folks are not sold on coming to Acts of Resistance at this point, I'm not sure what else we can provide, because I really just think you've touched on so many pieces that embody, like the energy and the spirit of this really

awesome experience. And, you know, I think we've got what like half an hour ish together to talk about this on the podcast today, and folks will get so much more than that out of a full course with you. So I'm hoping that folks are feeling really peaked, and will come out for one of the courses that we have coming up. So I guess the one question we didn't cover yet is what can someone expect from the course or the workshop? How does it help? What is that experience like?

Shaiden: So we will be will, we will be having these workshops, virtually, and they are a few hours long, you'll have the opportunity to meet other folks who are stoked to be learning this material alongside you. And there will be elements and dynamics of both conversation as well as physical techniques. So we will be focusing in terms of physical techniques. They are designed to be effective and simple techniques. You will have the opportunity to explore what it feels like to have a strong what we call hand weapon, a strong formation to your hand or your fist or have a strong kick and prove and have proper form. It will give you techniques that you can also practice long after the the workshop is over. So that these skills can become part of your toolbox. As much as whatever we've practiced in the past can be become part of our survival shaping. Whatever you practice in that workshop can also become part of your survival shaping. So by practicing the techniques that you'll learn in the class, there's no guarantee, but they're there when you practice physical and verbal and vocal self defense techniques, and you practice them out long after the workshops over and you build them into your muscle tissue, there is a way in which I know that muscle memory isn't scientifically an accurate term, but there is a way in which that knowledge lives within the muscle tissue and begin and can become part of your embodiment. For me, it is absolutely it has absolutely become part of my embodiment. There was one evening, I was still I think, pretty early in my journey to become a Wendo instructor. It was late at night, my friend and I were walking towards the metro, we were catching the last metro of the night. And this, this tall man came up to put his arms around us. And I didn't even think I just turned a 180 with my upper body and a heel palmed him into the chest. And he took three steps backwards. And he was like, Whoa, like, and he he was drunk, like, but he didn't see what happened. But even more impressive was that my friend didn't see what

happened. It was so fast and so automatic, he didn't even get his hands on us. But he was close enough for me to strike him in his in his sternum. So I look back at that. And I think, Wow, that is really, thanks to my Wendo training where it became so automatic for me. That, that it became that before I even realize what was going on, my body had activated in defense for me. And, again, there's no guarantees, yet, when it is that you practice, easy to integrate, or simple to integrate self defense strategies, they can also become part of how it is that you embody your resilience as you move through the world.

Anne: That is amazing. I am so grateful to have the chance to chat with you today. And hear your thoughts on this awesome program. And just you know, there's so much going on mentally right now that I feel like I'm just gonna, like reflect on and, and you know, and think about as as we get closer to our workshop coming up this month. And yeah, I'm just so grateful for you, or Yeah, for you for spending some time today.

Shaiden: I'm so grateful for you Anne and everything that you do.

Anne: Thanks. I feel honestly just so blessed to get to do work that is, you know, like in alignment with my values, but also where I get to bring in these really awesome programs, and I get to see the impacts they have on folks in our communities. So it has been like such a treat to get to work with you and Deb.

Shaiden: Ditto that. Thank you so much, Anne. And yeah. Wow, mad respect to Deb, one of my longtime mentors.

Anne: Yes, Deb is the coolest, we love Deb. So yeah, thanks so much for chatting today.

Shaiden: Thanks again for having me.

(Transition music)

Anne: So that was Shaiden from Acts of Resistance. And our very first Acts of Resistance course at the University of Windsor is happening on August 24, from 6pm to 9pm and will be held virtually. If you'd like to register,

you can email me at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. We do have a sliding scale available. So we are accepting donations to Trans Wellness Ontario at rates of either \$50, \$25 or \$10 for the course. And again if you need any support, you can reach out to us at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. Or you can check out the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. Their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca. So again, thanks for listening, folks. Make sure to like and subscribe if you enjoyed the podcast and check out our description for all the links from our awesome episode today. Take care everyone!