

US astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson targeted by #MeToo campaign

By David Walsh
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American astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson has become one of the most recent targets of the #MeToo campaign, the sexual witch hunt sweeping the professional middle classes in the US and beyond.

Nothing that has come to light so far demonstrates that Tyson is guilty of any wrongdoing. On the contrary, the published material suggests he is the victim of a virulent strain of political and psychological hysteria.

Tyson has been the Frederick P. Rose Director of the Hayden Planetarium at the Rose Center for Earth and Space in New York City since 1996. The Rose Center is part of the American Museum of Natural History, whose Department of Astrophysics Tyson founded in 1997.

Tyson hosted the PBS television show *NOVA ScienceNow* from 2006 to 2011. In 2014, he hosted the television series *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*, a sequel to Carl Sagan's 1980 series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*. He has also been the host of a television talk show, *StarTalk*, since April 2015.

Despite the unproven and flimsy character of the charges against him, *StarTalk* has been pulled off the air by the National Geographic Channel while Fox Networks Group investigates the allegations against Tyson.

The reader may judge for him or herself the seriousness of the accusations:

A woman by the name of Tchiya Amet El Maat, formerly Staci Hambric, with whom Tyson was a graduate student at the University of Texas in 1984 and with whom he had a brief relationship, started accusing the scientist in 2010 of having raped her three decades previously.

Buzz Feed News, which posted a lengthy, sensationalized article about the “case” against Tyson in December, notes that in 2014 Amet “traveled to Austin [Texas] to file a police report against him [Tyson]. Amet told the police she had waited so long, the report stated, because ‘numerous people’ had said that Tyson was ‘a high profile person and that no one would believe her.’”

“A week later, the police department reviewed the case and cleared it, finding that it surpassed the 10-year statute of limitations for sexual assault.”

(Of course, Tyson was not a “high profile person” in the 1980s, but a mere graduate student, for whom, in fact, the University of Texas experience was a “failed experiment,” in his words. He dropped out of the program after several years. Tyson later joined a PhD program at Columbia University.)

BuzzFeed notes that after leaving the University of Texas, where “without an astronomy background, she did poorly in her introductory classes,” Amet “sang in a reggae band, and fully adopted a New Age way of thinking about the universe—rooted in energy, astrology, and ancient teachings, rather than science. In 1995, as part of what she calls her spiritual healing, she changed her name to Tchiya Amet—which means ‘rebirth’ and ‘truth’ in Hebrew. ‘I did not want to identify with Staci—I wanted her to be dead,’ Amet said.”

The publication observes that on October 8, 2014, “Amet wrote a rambling blog post, as fragmented and disjointed as her memories of the incident, titled ‘I Survived RAPE by Neil de Grasse Tyson; The Blue Lotus Speaks!’”

“Rambling” is a polite term. This is how the blog post begins, *without corrections*: “Today is October 8, 2014. 30 years. Today there was an eclipse, during the Ra Aspolia Pi Cot Sahu (Full Moon and Portal of Djehuty (Sun in Sidereal Virgo, Moon in Pisces, Mercury Retrograde). Kinda intense when you really sit bak and take it all in. Tomorrow, Set (Mars, Ego) has an appointment with Master healer Imhotep (Mars enters Ophiuchus: tome for healing from sexual trauma, time for conquering lower nature, etc).”

“All this to say that this posting is in alignment with the Divine Natural Right Order. Although I know this is the right decision, it has been difficult to take action, because I know this monster [i.e., Tyson] is loved by so many of you. However, in order to maintain my own well being, peace of mind, sanity, longevity, positivity, peaceful relationships, health, happiness, self love and self trust, in order to eliminate blocks to my own abundance and prosperity, it has become impossible to keep silent anymore.”

On the basis of this sort of incoherent nonsense, a leading scientist is undergoing public humiliation and faces the threat of the loss of professional status and positions.

In a Facebook post, “On Being Accused,” Tyson responded to Amet’s allegations: “More than thirty years later, as my visibility-level took another jump, I read a freshly posted blog accusing me of drugging and raping a woman I did not recognize by either photo or name. Turned out to be the same person who I dated briefly in graduate school. She had changed her name and lived an entire life, married with children, before this accusation.

“For me, what was most significant, was that in this new life, long after dropping out of astrophysics graduate school, she was posting videos of colored tuning forks endowed with vibrational

therapeutic energy that she channels from the orbiting planets. As a scientist, I found this odd. Meanwhile, according to her blog posts, the drug and rape allegation comes from an assumption of what happened to her during a night that she cannot remember. It is as though a false memory had been implanted, which, because it never actually happened, had to be remembered as an evening she doesn't remember. Nor does she remember waking up the next morning and going to the office. I kept a record of everything she posted, in case her stories morphed over time. So this is sad, which, for me, defies explanation."

Tyson noted that Amet's allegation "was used as a kind of solicitation-bait by at least one journalist to bring out of the woodwork anybody who had any encounter with me that left them uncomfortable."

Appropriately, in fact, it was David G. McAfee on the "non-denominational" religion website *Patheos* who posted an article October 25, 2017 repeating Amet's entirely unsubstantiated charges. McAfee concluded his piece with this "solicitation": "If you have any more information on this alleged incident, or you have a similar story involving Tyson, please feel free to leave it in the comments or email me at david@davidgmcafee.com." It is hard to suppress one's indignation and disgust in the face of this kind of "journalism."

Some 13 months later, on November 29, 2018, McAfee posted another piece, which included allegations from two more women. In these cases, the individuals seem more reliable, but the incidents are almost too trivial to repeat.

Ashley Watson, a onetime driver for Tyson on his television series, claims the latter made "inappropriate" sexual advances toward her in the summer of 2018. (Generally speaking, sexual advances are "inappropriate" only when the individual in question is not interested in them. Otherwise, sexual advances are simply sexual advances.)

Watson accuses Tyson in an email of trying "to seduce me into having sex with him and it was super messed up and I had to quit my job."

This is McAfee on Watson's claims about some of Tyson's other crimes: "Specifically, Watson said Tyson occasionally made 'misogynistic comments,' and that he kept a list of overweight actresses on his phone to prove that women aren't inhibited by portrayals in the media when it comes to health and fitness. He allegedly said it was untrue that women feel pressured to be skinny based on societal standards." One gasps.

In his Facebook statement, Tyson acknowledges that he invited Watson—with whom during the course of shooting, he writes, he had "spent upwards of a hundred hours in one-on-one conversation"—to his place for wine and cheese. "Production days are long. We arrived late, but she was on her way home two hours later. Afterwards, she came into my office and told me she was creeped out by the wine & cheese evening. She viewed the invite as an attempt to seduce her, even though she sat across the wine & cheese table from me, and all conversation had been in the same vein as all other conversations we ever had." Watson left her job a few days before it was going to end anyway, with the completion of production.

We have no way of knowing whether, at the very "worst,"

Tyson attempted to "seduce" Watson, who was 28 at the time, or not. To the best of our knowledge, such things have happened before in human history without public outcry and disgrace. One would think this was some stock distressed damsel in a Victorian melodrama.

Dr. Katelyn N. Allers, Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Bucknell University, also a grown woman, told the ever-vigilant McAfee that she was "felt up" by Tyson at a party following a meeting of the American Astronomical Society (AAS) in 2009.

"Tyson was there, and he was dancing and drinking and all of that at the party, so a friend and I decided to get pictures with him," she told McAfee. Allers apparently has a tattoo of the solar system "that stretches from her arm to her back and collar bone area."

McAfee included two photographs, one of Tyson and Allers smiling for the camera, the other of Tyson looking at the tattoo on Allers' upper arm.

This is Allers: "After we had taken the picture, he noticed my tattoo and kind of grabbed me to look at it, and was really obsessed about whether I had Pluto on this tattoo or not... and then he looked for Pluto, and followed the tattoo into my dress."

This is McAfee: "*Dr. Allers said her experience was public and didn't rise to the level of assault, but that it did show Tyson was capable of some 'creepy behavior.'* 'My experience with him is he's not someone who has great respect for female bodily autonomy,' she told me in a phone interview." (Emphasis added.)

The Watson-Allers "allegations" against Tyson, on the face of it, are petty, absurd and vindictive.

In his Facebook post, Tyson writes, "For a variety of reasons, most justified, some unjustified, men accused of sexual impropriety in today's 'me-too' climate are presumed to be guilty by the court of public opinion. Emotions bypass due-process, people choose sides, and the social media wars begin.

"In any claim, evidence matters. Evidence always matters. But what happens when it's just one person's word against another's, and the stories don't agree? That's when people tend to pass judgment on who is more credible than whom. And that's when an impartial investigation can best serve the truth—and would have my full cooperation to do so."

We urge the strongest public support for Tyson and denounce the National Geographic Channel for their unwarranted and cowardly decision to suspend his program.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>